

Are you at risk? 07/24/11 Sermon by Roger Price

Are you at risk? Because, in a way I hope you are, or will be!
 What am I going to talk about? Personal security? Crime? Bad things? None of the above - sort of. You just heard Lue read the passage from Matthew (Matthew 24:4-14) which includes Jesus' warning to the disciples about their future and the future of the Kingdom Of God. Thank goodness we are not called upon to face the perils described in the passage, but sometimes we tend to shy away from saying yes to committing because it's outside our comfort zone or it causes us a fear reaction. The theme of this year's Tennessee UMC Annual Conference last month, was "Risk Taking: Missions and Service". During the conference, Dr Vin Walkup, who is the TN A.C. go-to person on the subject - presented his report on stewardship. Dr. Walkup pointed out that our denomination sees its mission to have "extravagant generosity" in our approach to the church's work. All of us are generous to some level, giving of our time and talents. The Extravagant generosity I'm talking about is increasing time and talent supporting the church. This year the TN Conf. will be sending out a survey to analyze our levels of generosity which includes the ways in which we give our time, talents and gifts of all types. There, I've said it, the stewardship word.

Historically, in England, each estate would have a steward; his responsibility was to see that the estate was maintained and improved to the land owners wishes.

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In the British Methodist church there is a position called The Steward. The Steward's responsibility is leadership; leadership that includes what we call in the U.S. Lay Leadership and Lay Speaker duties. Yes, stewardship includes commitment to funding the church, not just keeping our doors open and the preacher and staff paid, but also to allow us to bring in the funds necessary to do our missions and to pave the way towards going forward with our future needs. Following is a quote from our membership covenant:

"As members of this congregation, will you faithfully participate in its ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service?"

It seems that what prevents us from a full follow-up to these words is a fear of risk. It is my belief that risk is necessary. I'm not sure whether it's fear per se or the risk itself that prevents us from going forward.

As some of you know, the pastor has deputed me to ask members of the congregation to act as liturgist. I get the feeling that some I recognize as being good choice for this task are fearful. Following is a quote from a commencement speech given to Yale University this year by the actor Tom Hanks:

"Fear is cheap, fear is easy, and fear gets attention. . . It's fast, it's gossip and it's just as glamorous, juicy and profitable. Fear twists facts into

fictions that become indistinguishable from ignorance. If fear is cultivated, it will become stronger. If faith is cultivated, it will achieve mastery. Fear or faith – which will be our master?”

The substance of this quote is probably familiar to some of us as F.D.R.’s famous words “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.”

It seems that we should pursue our approach to supporting our work for the Lord further than the point of fear or risk. Why not go that extra yard or mile to accomplish what’s needed in the way of service, time and what talents we have at our disposal. For those of you who have picked up a copy of the Gifts and Graces questionnaire and not yet returned them, why don’t you take that risk? The information you give on these forms will NOT be posted on line. The information you provide will help us to include opportunities for you to be a part of the church’s work. Mark, chapter 16 verses 14 through 18 say “later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they appeared at the table and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them ‘go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation the one who believes and is baptized will be saved but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe, by using my name they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will pick up snakes in their hands and if they drink any deadly thing it will not hurt them. They will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover.’”

This indicates that Jesus was expecting the disciples to be diligent, to be faithful and to do good works. Stewardship includes the doing of good works, of using all your gifts and graces to the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. Acts chapter 1, verses 4 through 11, refers to the time immediately preceding Jesus ascension, and says:

“While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This’ he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ So when they had come together they asked him, ‘Lord is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied ‘it is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them, they said ‘men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven, this Jesus, who has been

taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him going to heaven.’ ”

John Wesley believed strongly in the ministry of all believers. And he viewed the whole world as a parish, not just what’s within the church’s walls. Our ministry should be in all places at all times.

I started this message by asking you if you are at risk. It is my feeling that, in order to carry out the ministry we are asked to do, we have to risk ourselves and not hide in a corner.

Our church is known as a welcoming, friendly, giving church, a church that believes in service to the community. To do this just adequately is not enough; it requires diligence on the part of all of us to do it well. Leadership in our ministry needs to be broad-based for now and through the future. To do a better job will require the risk implicit in taking the lead and picking up the mantle by each of us.

I hope you are willing to take that risk. Amen