

Sermon 2010 St. Timothy
1-24-10
Text: Matthew 24:42-47
Theme: Diligence and Wisdom

Peruse Amazon.com and you will find many books on how the Church should work.

“The Purpose Driven Church,”

“Comeback Churches,”

“Overcoming Barriers to Growth”

“Management Essentials for Christian Ministry”

Most, if not all models are from the business world. When will we ever understand that the Church is the Bride of Christ and neither a human organization nor a business? But Pastor, I often hear, you have to apply business models to the business side of the Church because while the Church is more than a business it is still a human organization operating within the context of the world around us which understands business. I used to argue. Now I just smile and say, “Let me know how that works for you.”

It will not work. And even when it seems to work, it is still headed for epic failure. If you want to hear a 50 year history of churches that have tried and failed, speak to Bishop Pittelko and he

will gladly regale you with many stories. When a congregation tries to use business or organizational models from the world, it is functioning in a realm that is totally alien to whom God has made it.

Our problem is that we want to take the mystery and magic out of everything and make every aspect of life fit our formulas. If I use this model of administration and combine it with this style of worship, then that formula will equate to a healthy growing congregation. It might for a while because all of us have some degree of spiritual ADD and any bright and shiny spiritual object will grab our attention...until the next bright and shiny object passes by. The reality is that the Church is the Bride of Christ and she is far more than we can define and too powerful for us to harness. We simply hang on, follow God's Word, even when it does not make good business sense and watch the miraculous happen before our eyes.

In our prayer of the day, today, we prayed that God would do two very specific things. So often we just tune out the Prayer of the Day as we read the announcements, fill in the attendance register and get settled in the pew after the mad dash into church 10 minutes late. But the Prayer of the Day is very important because it collects the themes

of the readings for that day. That is why it used to be called the Collect of the Day. Listen again to what we prayed.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have always given to Your Church on earth faithful shepherds such as Timothy to **guide and feed Your flock. Make all pastors **diligent** to preach Your holy Word and administer Your means of grace, and grant Your people **wisdom** to follow in the way that leads to life eternal.**

What is the job of a Pastor? To guide and feed the flock. I am called to guide the journey of this congregation through this valley of tears and toward paradise, and to feed you, as we move along, with God's Word and Sacrament to empower you for the journey. So we go on to pray for two specific things: diligence and wisdom. We pray that God would make me diligent in preaching His Word and administering His Sacraments. Then we pray that God would give you the wisdom to follow where I lead. And why is that important? Listen again to the Gospel.

⁴²Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

⁴⁵“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?

⁴⁶Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁷Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

The Lord did not leave us alone on this earth to muddle through the best we could. He left us in communion with one another as the Church with a leader called the Pastor. St. Timothy found that the world was at constant odds with the Church and trying to misdirect his people and lead them astray. He found that the prince of this world, Satan, was always trying to lull God's people to sleep with his lullabies of wealth and power and status. So St. Paul wrote him letters that are contained within the Bible encouraging him in his diligence and leadership and praying that His people would be given the wisdom to follow him.

Today we celebrate the simplicity of the Lord's plan. A faithful and diligent Pastor followed by wise people, both of whom ignore the call of the world and Satan and both of whom march on through this veil of tears knowing that paradise with our Lord awaits us at the end of our journey. We work together to stay awake, to stay alert, always on guard for the prowling lion who would lead us away from Christ and pounce on us when we have left his well-lit path. We do not need how-to books or popular models. We need only Word and Sacrament to

strengthen our faith which will in turn make us resolute in our callings and the Lord will bless us in the journey.

We are not an organization or a business. We are a family. No one is expendable, so no one is excluded or forgotten. We do whatever we have to do to bring everyone along. We don't ignore the needs of a person because he "got himself into this mess." We don't forget our brothers and sisters in Haiti because they are far enough away that we don't have to personally experience their pain. We don't answer the needs of the family with "well we can't afford that," anymore than we would eat a big juicy steak and then tell our own child to go hungry. We strive to walk together and we will continue walking together through this long, dark valley, up the mountain on the other side and together, we will walk through the gates of heaven.

AMEN