

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Apocalyptic Stewardship

“The Church has rendered stewardship to be ‘small talk.’”



SHORTLY AFTER THE DEATH OF EUGENE PETERSON, a reread of his wonderful work *The Contemplative Pastor* presented a serious challenge to stewardship. Initially its combative, almost dismissive nature raised hackles. Just a couple of sentences into the chapter, the faithful steward leader would be ready to drop the gloves and go bare-knuckle!

Peterson writes, “With the vastness of the heavenly invasion and the urgency of the faith decision rolling into our consciousness like thunder and lightning, we cannot stand around on Sunday morning filling the time with pretentious small talk on how bad the world is and how wonderful this **new stewardship campaign is going to be.**”¹

Aside from the obvious objection that one would have to the “faith decision” comment, stewardship being called “small talk” by a preeminent author on pastoral care? How rude! How insensitive to this critical work of leading God’s people to be who God has made them to be in Holy Baptism! But further review would make this seemingly offensive take on stewardship accurate. The Church has rendered stewardship to be “small talk.” Stewardship, as only finances, makes it small talk. Stewardship that is only meant to balance the budget to do what the congregation wants to do, perhaps even at the expense of what God has called them to do, is small talk. Stewardship is not small talk at all! What the Church has done to stewardship has made it small.

The Revelation of Pastoral Stewardship

Here is where Peterson is a master at being pastoral. In a chapter entitled “The Apocalyptic Pastor,” this pastoral heart provides the best possible answer to the Church’s sin of converting the big idea and identity of stewardship to small talk. While unpacking the loaded word “apocalypse,” Peterson gives the key to open the door to the transformational stewardship so desperately needed in so many congregations.

The word “apocalypse” simply means to reveal. When one reads the last book of the New Testament, which is called “The Apocalypse” in Greek, some strange and

¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1989), 39.

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wonderful things are revealed to St. John and to the reader about the person and work of Jesus, His return and what will take place in eternity. In this work, the corner is peeled back and the reader gets a glimpse of the wonders that only men like John and Isaiah have seen. What would happen in the Church if the same kind of apocalypse, or pulling back the corner, of stewardship would take place in the Church today? What would be shown is the truly pastoral nature of stewardship!

The Personal Impact of Apocalyptic Stewardship

Quoting Kasemann, Peterson writes about being apocalyptic. “Apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology. Perhaps, then, the grandmother of all Christian pastoral work. Early church Christians believed that the resurrection of Jesus inaugurated a new age. They were in fact — but against appearances — living in God’s kingdom, a kingdom of truth and healing and grace.”² The nature of the Christian, the nature of the steward is changed by their connection to the death and resurrection of Jesus! Of this there is no doubt! This is revealed in the Gospel. This Gospel has profound impact on the steward.

But how then is this fallen yet redeemed steward affected by this apocalyptic pastoral care? The call to repentance for the steward is seen in the urgency found in the reality that the steward is accountable to the Master, who will return and hold us to account! But is that accountability about the investment of money, willing service and effective use of abilities? No and yes. Will Jesus judge the steward on the use of their money alone? No. The steward will be judged on how they were stewards of the Gospel! Use of finances, service and abilities will either enhance the work of the Gospel for the sake of the neighbor or hinder it. That is the basis of faithfulness or lack thereof on which the steward will be judged at the end.

Encouragement to Be Apocalyptic

So what does the apocalyptic have to do with stewardship? That is where Peterson provides three great

encouragements. First, the pastor and steward leaders are to be apocalyptic prayers. Like John is “in the Spirit” in Revelation, so too should steward leaders be in prayer for the stewardship in their congregations. While the pastor in apocalyptic prayer is not receiving any special revelation as St. John did, the apocalyptic prayer of the pastor removes any kind of idea that we just need to be creative enough or programmatic enough to overcome stewardship challenges. Second, the steward leaders are to be apocalyptic poets. Peterson uses this as a pun on the Greek word for poets. They use words to create. The way the steward leader speaks of the identity of the steward flowing from baptism rather than budget is necessary. Peterson writes, “As a pastor he re-speaks, re-visions the Gospel so that his congregation experiences the Word, not mere words.”³ The Word makes and remakes stewards in the image of God! (Genesis 1) Finally, Peterson would encourage apocalyptic patience. The Word works in mysterious ways. But it does work. The same is true when steward leaders are looking to form a true steward identity among the people they are called to serve.

Stewardship is no “small talk.” It is a major undertaking. It calls for an apocalyptic approach. God’s Spirit, at work through Word and Sacrament administered by steward leaders in the congregation, will accomplish amazing things! This brings with it an urgency. It also brings with it a confidence. This combination is found in Revelation. Faithfully taught, it is found in stewardship too.



² Peterson, 40–41.

³ Peterson, 45.