

22 Stewardship Preaching Tips

By David Ponting

This is the time of year where we often turn our attention to stewardship and many of us are about to hold Commitment Sundays. At the risk of being presumptuous (as many of you have been preaching about stewardship for years) I thought I'd pass on some random thoughts gathered over time about the basics of preaching on stewardship.

1. Stewardship preaching starts with a personal philosophy of pastoral care. If people know you care about them they will listen. First and foremost provide pastoral care.
2. All stewardship preaching comes from a basic premise – God is “the Great Giver, the creator and owner of all; we are the stewards.
3. From time to time, do the work of reflecting on your own theology of giving and sense of God's abundance and providential care in your life. Allow your own sense of gratitude and blessing to come through in your preaching.
4. We are a people of the story which is why the narrative budgeting approach resonates. Reflect on and then tell your own stewardship story. People will listen.
5. Remember - people want to know how your own personal sense of stewardship of your baptismal ministry is part of the very fabric of your life. Help people to understand that it is through our stewardship of the gifts of God we live out our baptismal promises.
6. When looking at lections keep in mind the many ways we are called to be stewards. This will provide content for stewardship sermons. We are called to be stewards of:
 - Creation/Environment
 - Our Personal and work relationships
 - Our personal health
 - Our treasure
 - Our Spiritual Gifts

For preachers we can add to this list -

1. The Word
2. The Mission and Ministry of the parish
7. Stewardship preaching is not a once a year event. One of our challenges is to help parishioners to look at life through a stewardship lens. When we reframe our own understanding we can then teach others.
8. Use the Bible. From the very first book of the Bible, the image of God is one of an abundant, lavish giver. If we are created in God's own image, then to deny that, we are not allowing ourselves to become what God has made us to be. Look for biblical stories about gratitude and abundance. Remind parishioners that Jesus talked more about money than he did about heaven or prayer.
9. In the content of your sermons, invite lay people to take the time to reflect on and share their personal stories of God's care for them.

10. Encourage and find occasions to celebrate courage and risk informed by prayer. It takes courage to grow in Christian stewardship. It is a process and involves conversion and the work of the Holy Spirit. We are facilitators of that work.
11. Focus on Outreach. A preacher's task is to help create a bigger vision of the world in which we live; to make people understand that being generous makes a difference in the world.
12. Talk of money in the church is within the context of "doing ministry". Be unapologetic.
13. Always invite others to give. People experience great joy in giving. People NEED to give.
14. Make it personal.
15. Encourage people to tithe their time. We may not all have the same financial resources but we all have the same amount of time. If people move towards personal growth by the tithing of their time they will naturally gravitate towards the use of their talents and grow in commitment and deployment of their treasure.
16. NEVER shame people into giving.
17. Sometimes we don't stop to think that what we are preaching is a stewardship sermon. In some sense, every sermon we preach is a stewardship sermon, because every sermon we preach is about how we respond to God's grace in our lives.
18. Remember that you are not preaching to try and increase parish revenue but that the job of the stewardship sermon is to transform lives. In this way we can be totally unapologetic – we are gifting our congregations by helping them to see that their stewardship is an essential and life-giving part of their Christian discipleship.
19. Reflect on your audience. Most are probably struggling through life living most days locked in a personal spirituality of scarcity. They need comfort, hope, and to be challenged to allow themselves to be transformed by the Good News of God's abundant care. Others in your parish (a few) will spend more of their head space in a spirituality of abundance. They need affirmation and encouragement to reinforce that they are on the right track.
20. Think of your role as companion. As parish clergy we walk with our people through the rollercoaster ride of life. As a stewardship minister you may find it helpful to think of your role as companion on a journey from scarcity to abundance.
21. Thank people often for what they have done, what they are doing, and what they will do in the future.
22. Reflect on your own discomfort around preaching about money. Claim it. Own it. Then go out and experiment and have fun.