

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Various

"Let Us Arise and Build!" (one year later)

ONE YEAR LATER

A year ago, last weekend, we began a three year mission initiative, called "Let Us Arise and Build!" The theme was taken from Nehemiah 2 when after hearing about how Jerusalem and the wall surrounding it had fallen into disrepair many of Nehemiah's fellow Jews responded with the call, "*Let us arise and build!*" They stepped out in faith and action and accomplished the rebuilding of their beloved city.

We, likewise, had a similar opportunity. We had only been at our new location for a year. There was excitement and anticipation in the air. At the same time we were in the midst of one of the greatest financial crisis in history. Times were and still are tough economically. How would our church family respond?

Recall that we spent \$785,000 on this 37,000 square foot building and 2 acre property. We took out a \$375,000 mortgage to help finance the purchase and invested \$120,000 into bringing the building up to meeting our basic needs as a Christian house of worship.

But more work had to be done. We were in some sense beginning anew as an official Anglican Church. Since we had also become part of a new province in the Anglican Communion - *the Anglican Church in North America* - we now had the responsibility of building a Bible-believing Anglican Church in Western New York. The need is there when you realize that at least 2000 Episcopalians are no longer worshipping in Episcopal Churches in Western New York since 2001! Here are the statistics. 2001 the Diocese had 6200 on a Sunday in Church. At the end of 2008 when we left, the Diocese was down to 3900.

THE RESPONSE

So this mission initiative is not just a building campaign even though most of the emphasis has been on the building. It is to be more than that. I want everyone to look at the brochure we passed out last year. Notice again - our vision, our mission and the purpose of the mission initiative. We wanted to accomplish four things - 1) outreach and growth 2) renovate the building 3) tithe on the gross 4) pay down the mortgage.

Our parish responded tremendously. Please look now at the back of the bulletin insert with the Pslam. You will see that 239 commitments were made for the amount of \$741,000 during the next three years. This is additional giving above members' yearly pledge to our budget. Considering that about 250 families have yearly commitments to the budget we can see how there is nearly 100% participation for those who regularly attend. However, this still only represents half of our membership of 475 families.

As a result of this commitment the following has been able to be accomplished: roof repaired and improved, parking lot sealed and patched, new front entrance doors, new windows (108 of them!), the building sealed and repointed, a new garage, and a handicapped ramp.

All of this was accomplished as a result of the generosity of our congregation. And I say a big "THANK YOU!" to all who have made this transition possible. You have made this church stronger and are preparing it for the mission God has called us to do.

One of the reasons, I believe we have had this kind of financial commitment is due to the ongoing Crown Financial Bible Study Course that has been led by Gary Wisniewski during the last seven years. Over seventy of our members have completed this course during that time. While this study helps us look at our resources through God's perspective and the principles of His Word, it also teaches one of the foundational financial principles in God's Word - the tithe.

THE BIBLICAL TITHE

It is vitally important that we get reacquainted with this Biblical principle on an annual basis. I mentioned to Fr. Commins that it was good to hear a sermon on forgiveness we need at least once or twice a year. The same goes for the tithe.

Jesus spoke about money and our resources more than any other subject outside salvation. The Apostle Paul addressed the topic on many occasions. How we handle our money reflects what is really in our heart and how much faith we have towards God and His Word.

Before we look at what the Word teaches concerning the tithe, I want to respond to the minority view in Christendom that the tithe is no longer necessary. This view basically contends that the tithe was part of the Old Testament law and therefore since Jesus fulfilled the law and we are no longer under its restrictions, we no longer have to follow the tithe. The problem with such thinking is that Jesus never abolished the tithe. It is true that we are no longer under the legal requirements as it pertains to the animal sacrifices and specific rituals related to the atonement of sins because Jesus' death is sufficient once and for all. It also is true that we no longer have follow the specific diet God commanded the people of Israel to eat under the Mosaic Law. Jesus said in **Mt. 15:11**, *"It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."*

However, those things that Christ does not specifically address or change remain the same. They are still in force. Jesus said in **Mt. 5:17**, *"Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets, I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."*

So unless Jesus changes it, it is not to be changed. Jesus never lessened the requirements of the law, but rather, upheld them and even went further talking about true perfection. He ended the Sermon on the Mount

with the words, *"Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect."* This after saying things like *"You have heard it said, You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*

In reality, the call of both the Old and New Testaments is actually going beyond the tithe. The tithe is the minimum with offerings above the tithe. Please turn with me to one passage that Jesus deals with the tithe, **Matthew 23:23** *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others."* Here Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for neglecting the central tenants of the law but notice that He still upholds the tithe when he says, *"Without neglecting the others."*

In another more common passage, **Matthew 22:17-21** when asked if Jews should pay the Roman tax, Jesus responded with the question, *"Whose likeness and inscription is this?"* and they said *"Caesar"* and He said, *"Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."* In other words, still pay your taxes and still honor God with your life, your possessions and your money.

WHAT CHANGED?

So what is the difference between the requirement set forth in the Old Testament and tithing in the New Testament? In the Old Testament the tithe was a requirement for belonging to the faith community. During the time of our Lord, in order to enter the Temple and present your sacrifices, you had to pay in tithes and offerings. In essence, the tithe was a tax. What Jesus did, however, was to make the tithe no longer a specific requirement for belonging to Him or the Church. It is not mandatory for salvation or acceptance by the Church. However, it is still God's standard of giving and it is something that we should work towards if we are not tithing already.

The truth is, the reason why we are here and are able to do the things that we do is because a significant minority of our members either tithe or come close to the tithe. If there was not such a faithful commitment, we could not accomplish the things we have done this past year.

And so I want to thank those who have given, those who have wanted to give but maybe could not for whatever reason, and I want to challenge all here to sincerely ask the Lord, "What would you have me do when it comes to being a part of *Let Us Arise and Build!* and the ministry and mission of this church?"

Next week, we look at what we are planning to do in the coming year both with the building and the ministry and again look at what the Lord and the Apostle Paul has to say when it comes to giving. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!