

“Jesus’ Advice on Money: Being Christian in Troubled Economic Times” Psalm 146; Luke 12:13-34

We’ve probably all been hearing about, reading about, and even experiencing the economic news. Monday afternoon I got this magazine called The Circuit Rider. It is sent out to all the Methodist ministers. The main topic of the magazine this month is finances and the cover has all these dollar bills on it.

Then, Tuesday, even Miss Manners in the newspaper had a comment about money: these days it’s looked on more favorably to seem poor than to seem rich. (So many people are mad at the rich people).

But this sermon is about what Jesus would have to say about these times, especially to us.

Jesus talked a lot about money. He talked about the poor, and said that poor people would always be with us. He praise the generosity and dedication of the poor widow, who gave all her money, small as that amount was, to the religious temple.

Jesus had some stern words for the rich, also. He said it is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle, than a rich man to get to heaven.

But what about us, the folks in the middle, the working folks? What would Jesus say to us about the economic woes going on?

First of all, we can look at Psalm 146. Yes, that’s the Old Testament, but we’ve got to remember that Jesus was in on that, too.

Verses 3 and 4 kind of stand out: “Don’t put your life in the hands of experts who know nothing of life, of *salvation* life. Mere humans don’t have what it takes; when they die their projects die with them.” (Message)

Or, if you prefer a more familiar, older version: “Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is not help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.”

We have been putting our trust in princes—the princes of industry and finance. We have been putting our lives in the hands of the so-called experts.

We had the idea that the folks in charge knew exactly what they were doing. We’d forgotten that they are mortal, fallible human beings, just like the rest of us.

I don’t know if any of you saw the movie, “Fun With Dick and Jane.” It was a remake. It was set in the late 90’s I think, and at the end of it, one of the minor characters who had been having so much difficulty with employment and finance, gets a wonderful new job! With great benefits at this company called Enron.

Now, it’s not that employees there, or anywhere, are necessarily at fault. I’m not saying they should have known that that wasn’t a good place to work.

I’m saying that they, and all of us, have been giving way too much of our faith and hope and expectations to human-created institutions and ways of thinking.

We’ve been forgetting that our real faith is in God—our “hope is in the Lord our God who made heaven and earth.”

Our God is wise—our God provides for us—God grants our needs. But that is our needs, not our “greeds” as my friend Maud Smythe always said.

That brings us to the story Jesus told, the parable of the rich fool. Hmm, there were rich fools back then, too, not just in our news and headlines.

The other version of the Bible calls this the story of the greedy farmer. Maybe we can identify a bit better with that character.

But, in any event, the problem with this guy was greed. Greed led to other faults, like arrogance, and disregard of God. His self, his very soul was to be under God’s reign, not controlled by his wealth.

In the story, the man got his comeuppance because he died before he could enjoy all his wealth. He died with the most toys, and he didn’t win, he was still dead. And it was so silly of him to do all that anyway. You don’t tear down your barns because you don’t have enough room. Not before you have built something else. Just like when you are going to move, you don’t tear down your house, before you have a new house where you can move to and live.

A lot of us, in this country, even in sensible old Missouri, even here in this church, have found ourselves drifting into this kind of thinking, and these kinds of spending habits. More and more and more stuff and money. Maybe a lot, maybe only a little.

It’s easy to do somehow. Maybe it’s just human nature to “go along to get along.” But the economic situations—in our own homes, and our country, and even the world have changed, and we’re going to have to be more practical, less self-indulgent, more patient.

I know that old movie said, “Greed is good,” but it is not good. It never was.

And it won’t kill us. It probably won’t hurt to cut down on extravagance. Maybe we’ll have more time to spend with each other, with our families. That is usually how it is, for the ordinary person. You have time, or you have money, not both.

This will also be a time when those of us with enough need to help those without enough. We don’t let each other starve. That’s part of our Christian faith: we help those in need, with resources of all kinds, financial, practical, and even instructional. Wouldn’t it be great if the homemakers who managed during World War II rationing, could teach us their secrets of getting by in those days?

The other piece of advice, directly from Jesus, was “Don’t worry.”

Don’t keep worrying about getting enough to eat, getting clothes to wear, much less “bigger barns,” or bigger bank accounts.

We need to be clear—it’s the worry that needs to go, not the work or the effort or the planning, the worry.

Worry doesn’t accomplish anything, except stress, and ulcers, and indigestion, and high blood pressure. And worry can also sap our faith in God. Worry can shift our focus from what we believe, and who we believe in, to what we fear.

It’s no good to live in fear. That’s not what God created us for, not at all.

We've been created to be the children of God who are free, and happy, and good, and faithful to our beliefs.

We can manage in these troubled times. We can remember that God is in charge, not us, not any human being.

We can learn to be more cautious, more frugal, more patient. We can stop listening to and heeding those encouragements to excess spending and getting.

We can even learn to be thankful for what we do have—right here and now: life and breath and one another, and a God who loves us so much that God sent us Jesus, to bring us salvation and eternal life, and life abundant, life with joy and excitement and beauty and love.

That's the advice—don't worry, don't be greedy, don't put our trust in anyone but God.

God will never let us down.

Amen.

(By Rev. Sally J. DeMasters)