

Do you know that preachers are assigned texts to preach on each week? It is called the Revised Common Lectionary and many denominations follow the same text assignments. Sometimes the texts have nothing to do with what is happening in the world at the current time, and other times it seems as if God's timing is perfect with the assigned readings.

Today is one such day – perfect timing for our Gospel text to be about money and the government. What an economic rollercoaster ride we have been on recently. Until about a month ago, I had no idea what the Freddie Mac or Fannie Mae foundations were. I honestly thought that Fannie Mae was a chocolate store and I didn't understand why they would have so much control over our economy.

I have CNN set as my homepage on my computer, and I have gotten used to the red line being at the top of the page that signals breaking news – and lately that breaking news has all been about how the Dow Jones is doing – one hour it's up, and the next it's way down.

What has struck me time and again are the pictures that are posted on CNN.com. Pictures show people on Wall Street with their hands over their mouths in disbelief, and with people throwing their arms up in the air, and one photoshowed a person looking upward, seeming to be praying.

Last week there was a news story about a 90-year old woman who committed suicide in her house because the bank had foreclosed on it. People are giving up their animals and cars and are not taking trips like they used to. Depression is at an all time high, as well as alcoholism and divorce – financial stress is affecting all areas of our life. A recent report says that 8 out of 10 Americans are stressed about the economy.

And what about you? What is your story? How have you been affected by the current economic crisis? What have you cut out of your budget to meet the financial strain that most of us are experiencing? I invite you to take three minutes right now and share with someone next to you the answers to the questions I just asked. I know this is out of the ordinary for what we usually do during a sermon, but it is important that we take some time and share our stories and hear what others are experiencing. It is part of being in a caring, Christian community.

It is only fair that since I asked you to disclose information about yourselves, I should do the same. For Matt and I, we have cut down on our spending. We don't buy any extra food, just the things that we absolutely need. This means no ice cream – which is a favorite of ours! We don't buy clothes unless they're absolutely necessary. And this has been difficult for me to give up – but I haven't bought any new shoes in a long time. And Matt planned on buying a new bow for hunting this year, but has chosen not to.

Please share as you are willing – and if you choose not to share, then it's okay to talk about the weather or the Packers or something else. So go ahead and share with one another.

Wait 3 minutes

Okay, I invite you to turn your attention back to me. Thank you for being willing to share. What is happening in our country and now around the globe is considered a crisis – and it seems that many of us are functioning in a crisis mode. I know there are some in this congregation who are barely making ends meet – and some are NOT making ends meet. It is a challenge to simply figure out how to buy gas or buy a gallon of milk.

And we have felt the weight of the crisis here at the church as well. It is a struggle for bills to be paid. The weekly offering totals have been down. Understand that I am NOT trying to guilt you into giving more to the church. That's not what this sermon is about. I trust that you will give what you can, when you can and that you understand that giving your offering to the church helps us to help other people. So I do not want to guilt you into giving more. I am simply telling you the reality of what the economic crisis is doing in all areas of our life.

I have people calling my church office asking for monetary help with gas or food or rent payment. And a few weeks ago, our confirmation students went to the TLC Center to volunteer their time. The Center has gotten extremely busy in the last few months – Lori Laxton has already outgrown that building, which means the business is a success. But what it also means is that more and more families can't afford food or clothing and are turning to the TLC Center for help.

And so what are we to do? Have you asked yourself that question? What is this nation going to do? What is going to happen to us? I wish I had one, clear-cut answer for you, but I don't. But I can offer you this:

As your pastor I am called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to you. I am called to tell of the promises that God makes to each one of us. And so during these times of fear and anxiety and uncertainty, I will continue to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Because we all need some good news right about now, don't we?

Remember what Jesus said about money, "Give to the emperor what is the emperor's and give to God what is God's." As Christians we believe that EVERYTHING belongs to God. Our lives, our possessions, the hours of the day belong to God. Our fear, worry, anxiety, depression...those belong to God. And our money and stocks and savings accounts all belong to God as well.

Last week at our Monday night Bible study we read a Psalm that was about lament, about crying out to God. And maybe that is what some of us need to do right now. If praising God isn't possible, maybe we can instead tell God how frustrated or scared or worried we are. Here is the Psalm:

I call out to God without holding back. Oh, that God would listen to me! When I was in deep trouble, I searched for the Lord. All night long I pray, with hands lifted toward heaven, pleading. There can be no joy for me until he acts. I think of God, and I am overwhelmed with longing for his help. You don't let me sleep. I am too distressed even to pray! I think of the good old days, long since ended, when my nights were filled with joyful songs. I search my soul and think about the difference now. Has the Lord rejected me forever? Will he never again show me favor? Has God forgotten to be kind?"

Then we talked in Bible study about how being God's follower in mission does not guarantee an easy path through life. But we can remember what God has done countless times throughout the Bible. God rescued Noah from the flood. God led the Israelites through the wilderness. God rescued Daniel from the lion's den. God healed Paul from blindness. God saved a man who was possessed from demons. And God ultimately raised his son, Jesus Christ, from death.

God will see us through. God will see this economic crisis through, and we will be okay. Maybe our lives will be different, but we will be okay. We will be okay because we will be held in the grip of God, and God will never let us go. Amen.