

RIDGE RAMBLINGS ADDENDUM DECEMBER 2008

Message from:

Pastor Sang-Seon Park

I want to share this article below with our members who try to continue to be faithful in this time of hardship, fear, and uncertainty in terms of economic crisis across the country. As we remember, the Israelites passed through desert for forty years by God's guidance with unyielding march toward the Promised Land. I believe we can find the very reason and courage to move on our journey of faith. I hope this article will inspire us and keep us focused on God's mission to our community through our commitment of faith.

Tough Times and the Church's Response

Written by Rev. Jim Hanna, Foundation Director of Lake Junalaska,
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People are worried. You and I encounter retired folks who depend on their investments as the primary source of their income. Many have had to tighten their spending, and they worry that they will not have enough to get by. The stock market is not the only concern these days. You probably have people in your community and perhaps in your congregation who have experienced foreclosure or evictions. Maybe you are aware of persons who have lost or fear losing their jobs. This economic crisis is real, and it is scaring people. Adding to the fears, economic pundits on television wag their heads and conjure up The Great Depression.

Does the Church have a role in dealing with this severe economic crisis?

I believe it has a great role: namely, to help people conquer their fears and worries with the Peace of Christ. The Church----you and I----may not be the experts on economics or how to fix these problems, but we are the experts on defeating fear and worry. Now is the time for the Church to step boldly into this dialogue and proclaim the gospel. People may think that fear and worry will go away if we can boost the stock market or if we elect the "right" person president, or if we give tax money to the right group. They may think that what is needed is

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to round up the people who perpetrated the crisis and escort them to jail. But fear will continue because the stock market will fall again, good people will make bad decisions, and there will always be greedy con men and con women.

Defeating fear and worry is a Church job, because these are only and always defeated by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Look at the hope proclaimed in Romans 8 or the plain statement in 1 John 4:18 "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." In the closing verses of Matthew 6, Jesus tells us not to worry about the things non-believers seek, rather be confident in the knowledge that God provides for all our needs. Paul tells us to overcome anxiety in Philippians 4:4-7 by rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks. Jeremiah 29:11 reads, "For I know the thoughts I think concerning you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of hurt, to give you a future and a hope."

Those of us who know the powerful peace of Christ that passes understanding (it is beyond our abilities of rational thinking) have a joyful obligation to share that peace that is found in Christ. This is a great gift we have to give to a worried and fearful world that hungers for peace and "a future and a hope." People's fears will not be assuaged by stock market reports or expert prognosticators, but by Jesus, the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease.

So, where does church fundraising fall out in these difficult financial times?

This is not the time to retreat from church fundraising. It is the time to press forward. The Church is here to present God in Jesus Christ. What should we say, "Sorry, we can't afford to do that now?" In tough times the Church is needed more than ever, and the people of God must be challenged to meet that need. Ask the people to support the work of the church with the full confidence that this work is the most important work in the world. Yes, there will be some who will need to cut back, and we must show understanding and acceptance. But, despite the news report, the resources are there and most will meet the challenge. Allow these tough financial times to sharpen the focus and ministry of your church----to help your congregation define the importance of what you are doing and to establish the urgency of the high cause you represent.

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And please don't lead people into temptation by preaching a prosperity gospel that plays on people's desperation and greed. The message to proclaim is simple: give to the Church whose business is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. That is all you need. God will do the rest.