

Discouraged ... or Dangerous?

As we enter upon the Advent and Christmas season and celebration, with New Year and the Epiphany season not too far behind, we are confronted with the fact that the economic situation in our great state remains precarious at best. Although some political pundits think that the country has seen the worst of the recession, it is now generally accepted that Michigan, the first state to feel and recognize the recession, will be the last to come out of it.

What does that news do to the kingdom of God and its growth in Michigan?

On the one hand ... Nothing. Simply put, the kingdom of God is the gracious rule and reign of God in the believer's heart, or as Jesus said, "It is within you," (Luke 17:21). That gracious rule of God in our hearts that comes indeed without our prayers and effort is surely unaffected by the economics in our state ... although Satan would try and use it so, (Cf. Luther's Explanation to the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer). On the other hand, we don't want to keep our heads in the clouds and NOT think that our present state economy and its predicted future doesn't affect us. They can. With families cutting back because one parent has lost a job; with churches being affected because families have left the area, or even the state, in a search for employment; with relationships being affected as one spouse leaves for a job in a different state to support the family back in Michigan ... these are trying times. Discouragement seems to be daily knocking on our doors ... and discouragement is perhaps Satan's most used tool.

Friends, Christmas is all about God coming into our world, breaking into time as the Word made flesh, to make a difference, to bring the kingdom of God, and to demonstrate God's love – which He did. He is the One who eventually bore our sins, shame, and suffering on Calvary's cross so that by grace through faith we can live confident lives that exult, "If God is for us, who can be against us," (Romans 8:31) and also remember with the Apostle Paul that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us," (Romans 8:18).

We must not let the economy effect our station in life as God's forgiven and freed children, deter us from God's mission, or dic-

tate how we will live for our Lord: by faith, with an attitude of joy, obedient to the Word, persistent in prayer, confident in His mercy and grace, and content in His peace. In fact, the Apostle Paul recommends that we ...

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again: Rejoice!

⁵ Let your gentleness be

evident to all. The Lord is

near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything,

but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4)

The great Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection, the Gospel, is still "the power of God unto salvation," (Romans 1:16). It still brings forgiveness, hope, salvation, and eternal life. It still breaks the hardest substance known to man: NOT a diamond, but the sin encrusted heart. It still works faith in the sinner's hearts and sustains faith in the believer's heart; it still breaks the power of sin; it still sows and produces an eternal hope. The Gospel is still the power of God!

The crisis of this present economic situation allows us the necessity and privilege of drawing closer to God, believing, and sharing this Gospel power with as many people as possible. I am reminded by Jim Elliot of who God has made us to be and how He wants us to live. Elliot was a missionary in Ecuador to the Auca Indians. Along with Nate Saint, Pete Fleming, and Roger Youderian, he was killed by the Aucas on January 8, 1956, while trying to communicate with them. Later, Nate



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Saint's wife and children went to live with the Aucas and befriended the very natives that had killed their husband and father. (All this is documented in the book and in the movie, "*End of the Spear*").

Jim Elliot had a fervor to reach those who did not know Jesus ... and he passed that fervor on to his family. He believed that those who did not know Jesus would go to hell. He believed that the Gospel was still the power of God unto salvation. Read what he wrote, and may it challenge us all:

"We are so utterly ordinary, so commonplace, while we profess to know a Power the Twentieth Century does not reckon with. But we are "harmless," and therefore unharmed. We are spiritual pacifists, non-militants, conscientious objectors

in this battle-to-the-death with principalities and powers in high places. Meekness must be had for contact with men, but brass, outspoken boldness is required to take part in the comradeship of the Cross. We are "sideliners" – coaching and criticizing the real wrestlers while content to sit by and leave the enemies of God unchallenged. The world cannot hate us, we are too much like its own. Oh that God would make us dangerous!"

During this Christmas and New Year season, let us not be discouraged. Instead, by God's grace may we be dangerous ... and be used by God to advance His kingdom.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!
Pastor David P. E. Maier