

The Dow and the Empty Tomb

By The Rev. Dorsey W. M. McConnell

As the saying goes, every crisis is an opportunity. If that is true, then this economy must represent the opportunity of a lifetime.

I keep looking in the news, and on the Internet, for a glimmer of good news, and the few glimmers I find are not very credible. People can only take so much chronic disruption before they want to wish themselves out of the pit. The stock market goes up a few points, or housing sales post an unexpected improvement, and immediately you hear voices on the radio suggesting that we have scraped the bottom and are already on the way back up.

Not only do I not think this is the case, I hope it isn't. I don't think we have even begun to learn the lessons we need to from this "downturn." There is a great cleansing taking place in this event, a sort of scouring of the marketplace that might overflow into our brains if we can let its consequences penetrate into our psyches as much as into our pocketbooks. I'm thinking here not only of a return to basic values, but to the concept of "value" itself. What is something actually worth? How do we know? What does that mean? I am a rank amateur at this kind of thinking, but it does occur to me that an economy is a deeply complex web of interlocking social contracts whose sacrament is money: when these become sour or warped or fictitious, the money behind them goes the same way. And the converse is also true: wealth is not only the reward of human aspiration, ingenuity and diligence, but can also be the expression of rightly ordered social relationships based on a godly sense of value that sees the worth of things only in their relation to people. I hope this phrase doesn't sound impossibly quaint, but I have tipped my hand. I actually believe there is such a thing, and that we ignore it at our peril—as we are seeing.

But how do we get there from the chaos of the present? And how is this more than just nostalgia for a better (and simpler) time?

I think the answer to this actually lies in Easter. The resurrection of Christ is not merely the undoing of death, returning him to a prior state. The resurrection transforms the Lord's physical self and propels him into his future—and ours! In Christ, human life never goes back to what it was before. Rather it uses all experience—especially desperate, painful and confusing experience—as the crucible out of which all genuinely new life arises. That is the irreversible, compelling and transformative momentum of Easter—not merely an event, but a way of life made possible by God through faith.

It is no accident that Jesus devotes most of his teaching ministry to talking about power through parables about wealth and growth. We don't generally think of Jesus as an economist, but I think he is a great one. Most time we miss the point of his teaching, however, because we try to separate it from the mystery it is always pointing to, the paradox on which all life is centered but that we hate to learn: in order really to live, you

have to die; but if you die well, you will live better than you ever imagined. This is the opportunity that is being presented to us in this present moment. How will we seize it?

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