

God's Beloved People,

I will never forget what my friend, Stephen Bouman, said after the disaster of 9/11. Stephen was the bishop of the Metro New York Synod of the ELCA and was very close to victims and the city he loved. Stephen said of the church, "We were baptized for this moment!" I remember thinking, "I wonder what he means by that" and over the next days it became clear.

The fundamental question of this life is "What do I trust." This is the "God Question" according to Martin Luther in his introduction to the Large Catechism: "That toward which your heart inclines and entrusts itself is truly your god," said Luther. It means, of course, that we can become our own god if what we ultimately trust is our own ability to make life rich and meaningful.

Jesus Christ has invited us to trust him and him alone. He presents himself through the power of the Holy Spirit in scripture and sacraments and through the witness of people who have discovered in him a powerful invitation for trust. It is to this trust that we bear witness when we say to another person, "I trust Jesus with my life, with my whole life. In him I find my resting place. I invite you to trust Jesus too."

Today's news of the US and world economy reminds us of the God Question: What do we ultimately trust? To the extent we may have slipped into a reliance on ourselves, our plans, our pension plans, we are in trouble; we have slipped into worship of a false god, often without meaning to or even knowing that it has happened. When the bottom falls out from under us we realize we have wandered away from our truest home, our most essential trust. In these turbulent days I pray you will find yourselves called home to trust in Jesus, especially if you are one who is suffering from the false promise of other gods.

How might your trust be rekindled? Read one of the Gospel books through in a single session and let the Holy Spirit draw you in to the power of Jesus' appeal. If that seems too daunting, ask your pastor for a copy of Dan Erlander's little book, *Manna and Mercy*. There you'll find the whole Story of God's activity with the human family, and in the winsome cartoons I think you will find the Spirit and rest. More than that: I think you'll find joy in this strange story of the God who chooses to enter our life, stand beside us, and take our place before the demands of false gods. It is a wonderful story! It is the Life-Giving story!

Another way: If you have a loved one that you trust with your fears, ask that loved one to tell you the old, old story once again. Each of us gets lost once in awhile. Susan and I have turned to one another at different times in our marriage and simply said, "Tell me the story again. I think I've forgotten it." In the safe retelling of the story you will discover a grace that lies within reach, one that offers a safe anchor in life.

Perhaps you'll be asked to bear this old story to someone who is in trouble. Is this a way this crisis of confidence may work for good? We surely need practice telling the story, making our witness to the ultimate source of hope! If God can use this time to draw us out of ourselves and into the rearticulation of this story for others, we will be a renewed church!

Is there hope? Yes there is and once again, it is as close as our bibles. I've been reading a good deal about Jeremiah in the last few months. Jeremiah was the prophet chosen to bear bad news to Israel when they went off course. It was Jeremiah who told his people that the only course of faithfulness in their situation was to submit to exile in Babylon (Jer 38:17-18).

It was at the peak of Jeremiah's intensity, right at the moment when the people were to be banished to Babylon, that a strange and wonderful tale is told. Read Jeremiah 32. Here is the story of a relative of

Jeremiah's who came to him to say that a piece of family land had now come to Jeremiah and Jeremiah was to buy it. What could be more inconvenient! Exile was imminent!

If you've read Jeremiah you know what happened: Jeremiah took advantage of this inconvenient moment and turned it into a sign of hope. He bought the land--going through all the steps to make it a legitimate purchase--and then declared this Word of the Lord: *"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land."* (vs. 14-15).

Here was the sign that God's wrath for worship of false gods would not last forever! Here God declared that there would be a return and that once again life would flourish and houses and land would be bought and sold again! Could you use such a word today? Perhaps, like with God's own people, we need a time of correction, a time to remember where our ultimate trust has been called, a time to re-member the Body of Christ for the new day that is ahead. Is this punishment? I don't think so. We face hard consequences but I do not believe we have been abandoned. What we could not, and cannot, do for ourselves, our God has done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus!

What is our calling during this time? I think it is time to remember the promises of God in scripture, a time to teach the faith to our children and our children's children. It is time to rehearse the story we know so well, to remember it and tell it to others who that are looking for hope. "We were baptized for this moment," said bishop Steve Bouman. We were baptized for this moment and now bear this hope: Let us speak of it and steady the world! In particular, let us attend to the most vulnerable among us, the poor, the landless, the hungry. Don't waiver in your support of your church's mission to these vulnerable ones through Lutheran Community Services, the Hunger Appeal, and Lutheran Disaster Relief. Reach out to those in your neighborhood, community, and congregation who are hurting.

As for the synod, in a few days we will know whether the 20 acres of land we have sought in Meridian, Idaho, will be purchased for us by our Mission Investment Fund (MIF). I have been tempted to find a way out of this deal given that it will be so difficult to finance the rest of the project. But then I reread Jeremiah and wonder whether God isn't showing us hope for the future and inviting us to "buy land" as a sign of our confidence that we are not abandoned. Jeremiah witnessed to his terrified community in this way. Perhaps this is our witness to our community, our sign that we will invest in the world that God loves and desires to save. We will bear witness to the Treasure Valley community that there will be new jobs, there will be construction income ahead, and there will be new ministry by sturdy Lutheran people. Houses and land will be bought and sold again!

Dear Brothers and Sisters: I wish you God's peace in the midst of dangerous turbulence. I wish you the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding. I wish for you the hope expressed by Jeremiah, the deep and fearful confidence expressed by Jesus on the Cross, and the promise of the resurrection that is ours to draw on today.

Joy and confidence! We were baptized for this moment!

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