

**The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa**

November 16, 2008

Proper 28a

Judges 4:1-7

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:14-30

Back in September, when the stock market was beginning its crash, and when Lehman Brothers and other Wall Street institutions were beginning to collapse I sent an email to a friend of mine in NYC asking him, half seriously, if he thought this was the end of the world. He wrote back to me that while he himself did not think this was the end of the world, walking around Manhattan, it seemed to him that there were many people on the streets who were believed it was.

Obviously, the world did not come to an end in September. Nor did it end in October. And, it seems likely that we will survive November as well. Still as we ponder the bankruptcies of more and more companies, as we ponder the possibility that even General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, the Big Three of American Industry may go belly up, , the question arises again. Where is this going to end? Is this the end of the world?

As a child of a father who worked for General Motors for nearly 35 years. As the child of a mother who has benefited the from the pension and insurance coverage that Generous Motors has granted its retirees, I have to confess that even though I presume that this is not the end of the world, there is part of me that staggers at what I see happening.

I was raised believing that as goes General Motors, so goes the American economy. If GM goes bankrupt, what will be the fallout, for my mother, for Michigan, for the country, and I confess for the church. Where is it going to end? Is this the end?

When I think these happy thoughts, I am reminded of a course I took over thirty years ago at Central Michigan University. It was there at Central that I took my first class in the New Testament. Dr. Stanley Walters was teaching the class. One day I remember someone citing some comet that was appearing in the sky, citing some events that were happening around the world, wars, famines, alliances, he wondered if Dr. Walters thought this was the end of the world.

Dr. Walters smiled and said, you know, people have been predicting the end of the world for thousands of years. Christians have been predicting the end of the world since the earliest days after Jesus. They have always been wrong he said, I suspect they are today as well.

Comforting thoughts. Even if General Motors and the Big Three go bankrupt, this is probably not the end of the world.

I bet you feel better already don't you.

People have been predicting the end of the world forever. Christians have been predicting the return of Jesus from their earliest days.. Our readings today have a certain end time flavor to them.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is the earliest writing of the New Testament. In it Paul speaks of the coming of the day of the Lord. The day of sudden destruction that will come like a thief in the night. It is a day that Paul is expecting to come soon.

Matthew is writing to a Christian community that has witnessed the armies of Rome destroy the city and temple of Jerusalem. He was writing to warn the Christian community that its master would soon return and demanding an accounting for the talents, which he had given them.

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Now, on the one hand it appears that Matthew and Paul were both wrong. The day of the Lord's return did not come as soon as they expected. Indeed, they both seem to have been off by at least a couple thousand years.

On the other hand, you could make a case that they were both right.

The truth is that in some ways the world is always ending. The world of yesterday is gone. The sun has set on world of Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch and many other Wall Street institutions. Their day is gone. The sun is setting on the world of the Big Three auto companies. The world ruled by General Motors is gone, and a new world is already being born. A world ends every time we pass through one stage of life to another. A world ends when a job ends. A world ends when a marriage ends. A world ends when we pass from one age to another. A world ends when we pass from one stage of health to another. The sun sets every day. The sun sets on every stage of life through which we pass.

Paul tells the people of Thessalonica, that they are a child of light, they are the children looking for the world that is being born. Paul's letter invites us to share that light. Paul invites us to be dressed in faith and love and hope as we prepare for the new birth this new day will bring.

Over the past many weeks we have been speaking, writing, reflecting on the theme of financial stewardship. Next Sunday we will invite you to make your financial commitment for the coming year. It is humbling and not a little bit frightening to speak of financial commitment in a time of so much economic fear. I am so very much aware of the financial hardship that so many are facing.

My focus today then is not about you digging deeper to give more. My focus today is on the confidence that we as a church are called to have. We, like the servants in Matthew's gospel, have been given much. We have been richly blessed. We can be tempted to take those gifts and bury them. Save them for a rainy day. But, I believe the Gospel is telling us that this would be a mistake. The only one who lost his talent, was the worthless lazy slave who played it safe buried it. This frightening time is the time for us to be bold. To take risks. To try new things. To find new ways to serve, new ways to worship, new ways to reach out, new ways to proclaim the Gospel.

Some believe that if General Motors collapses, it will be because they did not risk, they buried their wealth. They tried running the same old company in the same old way. They tried competing in a 21st century world using 20 century ideas.

If we as a church are to be the children of light...we cannot be a 18-19-20th century church, we must be children of the world in which we live. We must preach the Gospel of Jesus in brave new ways. If not, we will go the way of Lehman Brothers, and General Motors.

2008 is not the end of the world, most likely 2009 will not be either. ....no matter what struggles we face. The new buds of new life are already being born. Today is in fact the beginning of a new world, a world being born in the light of renewed faith and hope and love.

Is there pain, of course. New birth is always painful. But, let us give thanks that even in the face of fear there is hope, even in the midst of darkness there is light, even as yesterday is passing away, a new day is dawning, even in the midst of pain we are being invited by Jesus, to come and enter the joy of our God.

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