

RIDING THE WAVE

Is 65:17-25

PENTECOST 24

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SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH, LUMSDEN

It was time for a periodic meeting with my investment advisor about a week ago. He's been doing quite well for me over the last couple of years, and although I still can't retire any time soon, he had a new idea to share with me this time.

He pointed out that China and India are the new growing economies. This wasn't anything new to me, but he continued. With an economic growth rate about 3 times that of Canada and with the 2008 Olympics coming to Beijing, the Chinese are on the verge of entering a consumer society. For the first time in their lives, many Chinese are earning more than it costs to feed their families. This surplus wealth is making its way into buying cars, pots and pans, and indoor plumbing and has caused a worldwide shortage of energy, steel, and other base metals such as copper and nickel.

He pointed out an interesting statistic: In Canada, there are 960 vehicles for every 1000 people with a driver's licence. In China, there are just 15 vehicles for every people. This was his argument for me putting part of my portfolio in Canadian based resource companies so I could begin to ride this wave.

His argument was persuasive and I agreed to make the switch. Over the short term, it seems like a sound investment.

Normally, we want our investments to have a good rate of return. Normally we want our economy to continue on the same course and speed. Normally, I'm no different in this respect.

But this time, I'm a bit nervous. I'm trying to think what this world would be like if Chinese person over the age of 16 had a vehicle just like we do in Canada. What would 2 billion more vehicles look like in our environment? Is there even enough wood, metal, glass, plastic and oil to even support such a global economy?

The questions don't end there. At a deeper level, is our current economic model even sustainable? Our capitalist system is very good at creating wealth but it isn't very good at distributing it fairly or evenly. It's very good at maximizing income over the short term but it doesn't take a very broadminded or long term view of the social and environmental costs of development.

Our political structures don't fair much better. Governments get elected for four years, not for twenty. We don't elect our leaders because they have a plan to ensure that our grandchildren have jobs and clean air; we elect them because they promise to lower our taxes today.

So, although I want my investments to do well, it might be the best thing for all of us if our mutual and pension funds tank sooner rather than later.

As we draw near to the end of the church year, our lessons increasingly focus on the end-times. It's a fundamental fact of our faith that the world won't just go on forever. As Christians, we do not believe that God's plan for this world is "steady as she goes." We do not accept that the world will get better on its own, that people will just evolve to be more loving, compassionate or caring of each other.

Rather, we believe that God will interrupt history, and that this interruption will bring to an end all the injustice, war, violence, crime, poverty, inequality, abuse, exploitation, pollution, illness, hatred, racism, greed, lust that we have grown so accustomed to.

Our passage from Second Isaiah this morning paints a wonderful image of what that interruption can look like:

“For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; but be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight.

No more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime. One who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth.

People will build houses and not have them stolen by another. People shall plant vineyards and crops and be assured that they themselves will benefit from the fruits of their own labours.

The wolf and lamb will eat together. The lion will eat hay like the ox.”

It’s a brave new world, but it’s quite different from the one we have and the two cannot exist together.

And a question we might well ask ourselves is whether we would be ready for such a world. Could we embrace it? Or are we more content with riding the wave of our current economic and social order until it washes out on some rock?

We’re often afraid of change. We’re afraid of change because we’ve found a way to live with what we have. We’re afraid of change because our experience has taught us that it means less than what we have right now.

But what if change meant more? What if a changing world could mean more peace, more harmony, more equality, more justice?

As people of faith, we have to be ready for the change when it comes; we can’t plant our feet too firmly in this world. We have to know that God’s plan for our world is not the plan we’re living out today. We have to know that we can’t ride this wave forever.

And while that idea may seem unsettling, it really shouldn’t be; we can’t go on following the road we’ve taken to this point. We need a new way. Once again God’s love and grace comes through, and we are invited to take comfort and participate in God’s new plan for our world. “Be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.”