

Anxiety, Giving and Lent

February, 2008

With the plunging stock market and other deteriorating economic indicators many of you may be curious about how this could affect giving to your church.

The following quote offers us little comfort in this regard:

"The biggest losses in giving to religion come from high income families who are worried. Households with incomes exceeding \$75,000 drop their giving six times more when worried (42%) than those with incomes less than \$25,000 and nearly twice as much as those households with incomes between \$25,000 and \$75,000." (Chronicle of Philanthropy, Lipmann, 9/7/04 as quoted by Dr. Bill Enright in his 2004 address to the Pittsburgh PEER Conference entitled "[The Question Jesus Never Answered!](#)") [PDF file]

As we travel through the season of Lent, perhaps we would do well to look to the resources of our faith as a means for addressing such anxiety.

In a 2007 [Christian Century](#) article on psalm 27: 1-14, (Feb. 20, 2007, pg. 20), Bowen Family Systems thinker Pete Steinke writes:

"Rabbi Abraham Heschel claimed that the role of the prophet is to cast out fear. The psalmist does this using poetry in the service of prophecy, showing a way to parlay fear into energy, to transmute danger into possibility and to switch power from the scary present to the things that might be. . . .

Moving from the vision of the moment to a wider view of the future with firm confidence in the Lord, the psalmist says:

'Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
Yea, wait for the Lord!' (Ps.27:14)

Through the centuries, these and other words of the Psalter have been a reservoir of refreshment for those bowed down by the limits of life. The psalms are regularly recited in Christian worship, and for good reason. According to studies associated with brain imaging, the amygdala responds powerfully to calm words, gentle touch, and faces. Human presence and voice are resources for "new creation." Let us say to those of fearful heart, the Lord "will come and save you" (Isa. 35:4). Take courage. God is a God of the things that will be."

Turning to the psalms in this way may not solve all our budget problems, but if it can begin to lead our people to view their passing economic fortunes with trust

in God's providence, it will be a step in the right direction.

Grace and Peace,
Fred Milligan