

There is a saying, **“May you live in interesting times,”** considered to have originated in China but may have been first stated in England or the United States, that provides a quandary whether it is a proverb or a curse. Its meaning is as opaque as its origin. But, it serves as an excellent description of this special period in which we find our lives tossed by events and circumstances beyond our control.

We are reminded of another axiom, “Out of chaos comes opportunity,” which is quoted often these days in reference to the financial crisis that grips the world’s economies. Perhaps it is more a word of hope than an actual prescription for reality. Given the uncertainty of market forces driving significant sectors of American life, people are hoping something good will come from the bad news about job losses, foreclosures, and bankruptcies. What is clear is the chaos. If opportunity follows, we wonder for whom.

Unfortunately, there are obvious signs of people taking advantage of the downturn. Some may consider such behavior as ‘opportunity,’ but there is a better way. **This special period provides a moment for all of us to take a deeper look at what is taking place so we can make real changes for the good.**

For example, as we learn about the exploits that created much of the disaster we are witnessing in cities across America, what if people of faith were to apply the principles of their traditions in response to situations that require extreme assistance? Can we imagine other ways to address the economic crisis besides pouring more borrowed money into the drains of commerce?

What if we were to practice ‘forgiveness of debts’ the way many Christians pray about when they recite the Lord’s Prayer? What if we were to define community by the coming together of neighbors to assist families in need? What if ancient faith practices of ‘welcoming the stranger’ became our way of life? Can you imagine the positive difference it would make during these ‘interesting times’?

This Sunday is Pentecost, the fiftieth day after Easter. It is the “birthday of the Christian church.” On Pentecost, followers of Jesus came out of a house in Jerusalem and spoke in the many languages that were present in the city. There had been 120 devout followers praying together for ten days. Their lives were forever changed. They lost their fear and gained a new vision of the world. They formed community by giving away their possessions and coming to the aid of the most vulnerable.

In interesting times, unusual courage is required. Binding people together is a source for recovery. This special period provides an opportunity for all of us to think differently about what is truly important. We can assess the value of life and the role we will play to change conditions that threaten Creation.

Whether the mysterious saying is a curse or a proverb depends on what we do in times of crisis and challenge. We are given the opportunity to come together with a common purpose to make society and the world a safe place where children can play and elders can walk with their canes through the streets unafraid and without fear.

In this special period, we can make the difference between people sleeping in homes and leaving families outside because their homes were foreclosed. We really do have a choice about what happens. Will we make these ‘interesting times’ a curse or a blessing? On this Pentecost Sunday, give some thought to the power we have been given to do extraordinary good.

-Pastor Art Cribbs