

CRIBB <S> NOTE – MARCH 28, 2010

We enter this holiest week of Christianity with great awareness of the relevance of Lent. Lent provides a dedicated period of meditation and reflection. It is a time when we consider the essential aspects of life and ponder the problems that detract us and consume our resources.

We have witnessed recent events that rocked our world, including the earth quakes in Chile and Haiti; a formerly dormant volcano in Iceland that erupted after 200 years of silence; cold, bitter weather dumped record-amounts of snow and ice in Washington, D.C., and along the East Coast; and the Pacific Ocean surged with rising tides in Hawaii and Southeast Asia.

New York City is reporting unexpected increases in the number of homeless individuals and families mostly attributed to joblessness and bankruptcy in association with the nation's economic downturn. Banks continue to hold inventories of properties set to be foreclosed as housing markets across the country continue to reel as many homeowners are drowning under water because the true value of their homes is below their mortgages.

In a reported historical moment, a divided House of Congress passed a health care reform bill that is intended to regulate insurance companies and the medical industry while at the same time it will mandate medical coverage for every American citizen.

Hate speech accelerated in the face of progressive efforts to broaden the inclusion of residents whether or not they are legally documented to participate in the opportunities to succeed in this society. Amid rhetoric to stimulate fear and suspicion, gun control has been weakened and more people have armed themselves as they publicly display weapons in establishments where alcohol is served.

The increasing numbers of poor people and underemployed workers too often go ignored while students from pre-school to university graduate schools are threatened with tuition hikes, classroom shutdowns and over-crowding with fewer instructors available to educate them.

The United States Supreme Court has given corporations the protections of human beings to have voice and the legal ability to use their treasuries to finance political campaigns that promise to safeguard their assets and their interests. The civil liberties of citizens have been pushed back by additional language and laws in the so-called Patriot Act that is intended to reduce terrorists' attacks on the United States.

The litany of economic, social, political and moral sea changes across the nation and around the world is long and seems endless. The prophets of old warned against similar conditions and human responses during times of inappropriate ordering of priorities. People suffer when profits are placed above the needs of children, elders, widows, the poor, and the most vulnerable. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." (1Timothy 6:10a)

As we approach this week of triumph, joy, sorrow, degradation, suffering, and victory how do we connect today's conditions to Jesus?

Times are changing but not so much as to be indistinguishable from the life and vision of Jesus. "As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.'" (Luke 19:41-42)

We still have not learned the lessons that make for peace and too often we are blind to the realities and circumstances so many people face. Our priorities are out of sync. So, what must we do?

First, we must turn our attention to God and listen carefully to what God is saying. It is a trap to wander in search of 'God's conformity to our desires'. We must repent and conform to that which

God requires of us. We must put God first.

Second, Jesus provides a way of living that connects us to each other. When we care about our neighbors and ourselves, we are united by God's Spirit that fills us with love, compassion and mercy. We focus more on others and less on us.

Recently, I heard the story about a man who was driving in a blizzard. He lost control of his car and ran into a snow bank. Stuck along the highway, he decided to walk back to an exit he had passed in search of help. He was wearing only slacks and a sports jacket. As he headed down the road, he felt the cold, damp air and realized he could die. Then, something deep within him emerged. He began to run at a pace that allowed him to keep moving for 40 minutes. He survived the elements and found help.

In the midst of turmoil, uncertainty, and distress, God's undeniable love is within us to help us overcome incredible obstacles. From the cross Jesus cried out in a moment of extreme loneliness and found a well of encouragement: God's love. God gives us a peace that is beyond understanding for these times. We access that peace and love when we submit ourselves wholly and freely to God. That is what Jesus offers us. That is the first step toward correcting our mistakes and putting our priorities in right order.

-Pastor Art Cribbs