

Wall Street  
By Rev. Rebecca Clancy

Isaiah 10:12-15

Wall Street was shaken to its foundations last week when Lehman Brothers', Merrill Lynch, and AIG became the latest casualties of the housing crisis. And now there are the aftershocks. Those who discovered they are soon to be unemployed are dealing with disorientation, loss, and, most importantly, concern for their livelihood. Add to that concern that in their field they are presently nearly unemployable. And then there are the neighboring financial institutions that are watching from the sidelines in various states of panic. And then there are the customers consumed with worry over the risk to their investments. And then there are the global markets bracing against the ripple effect. And then there is us, no longer able to deny or ignore that our economy is indeed in dire straits. And together we all wonder just how bad it's going to get. To tell the truth, I do not fully understand the problem or remotely understand what the solution may be. I am not an economist. But I do know this. Excess and mismanagement cannot and will not stand.

Hurricane season is now upon us. If it seems worse than usual that is because it is. Scientists have documented that hurricanes and other destructive storms are on the sharp rise, and they are attributing it to climate change. We had just a hint of what it's like to experience nature's fury last weekend with the torrential rains. And it will get worse, much worse, before it gets better. The effect of the melting arctic ice cap, for instance, has

yet to be felt. Those coping with too much water, however, will fare far better than those predicted to have none at all. But again, to tell the truth, I do not fully understand the problem or remotely understand what the solution may be. I am not a scientist. But I do know this. Excess and mismanagement cannot and will not stand.

Medical care now constitutes 16% of the Gross National Product, and more than half of the present need for medical care is in one way or another self induced. It is in large part simply the bad habits we have acquired with reference to our food intake – a taste for junk food, a contrived need for high efficiency and immediate gratification, a lack of self-discipline. But it is in larger part due to a general environment that has become increasingly toxic. It is theorized that the growing cancer and autism epidemics are the result of this toxicity. And it's nearly impossible to avoid. The toxins are in our air and water. They are in the dyes and preservatives in our foods. They are in the produce we feed the animals we use for meat and milk. They are in our medicines and inoculations. Acquire the best habits in the world and there is no immunity from our general environment. Once again to tell the truth I do not fully understand the problem or remotely understand what the solution may be. I am not a doctor. But I do know this. Excess and mismanagement cannot and will not stand.

And how do I know this with such certainty? I read the Bible. It documents beyond the shadow of a doubt that excess and mismanagement cannot and will not stand. Take our Old Testament Lesson for instance. Isaiah addresses himself to the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian Empire was one of the greatest empires in all of history. It is hard for us to

conceive of any empire at all much less an empire of this magnitude. America is sometimes considered an empire and may indeed exert like hegemony, but America is not an empire. America is a powerful nation. The great empires of history, like the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire, the Greek Empire, the Roman Empire, and Assyrian Empire absorbed powerful nations. They spanned the entire civilized world. The Assyrian Empire, for instance, spanned from Egypt (and 500 miles up the Nile) to Palestine, to all of Mesopotamia.

But the Assyrians were a ruthlessly violent people. Their Empire was held together by a lust for power and brute force. Any resistance by its vassals was met with sadistic reprisal. But humankind is not meant for that kind of oppression, and it will not brook it for long. And so, here and there, at any propitious opportunity or sign, its vassals rebelled. Their rebellions were often suicidal, but intentionally so. They deemed that death in the name of resistance was not death in vain. As rebellions continued, the Assyrian Empire found itself overextended and depleted. And finally a counter force arose that was a force to be reckoned with. The Assyrian Empire collapsed nearly overnight. This is because excess and mismanagement cannot and will not stand.

And Isaiah knew it all along. At the zenith of the Assyrian Empire's power, he was no more fearful of it than one is the street corner bully. He knew it was just a matter of time. He knew it could not and would not stand, that God would not allow it to stand. And so Isaiah declared, "Shall the ax vaunt itself over the one who wields it, or the saw magnify itself against the one who handles it?" God would punish the Assyrian Empire.

Yes, the Bible documents that excess and mismanagement cannot and will not stand, and not as the exception to the rule, but rather as the rule without exception. They didn't then, and they won't now.

And we need not don the prophet's mantle to declare it. In fact, it is pernicious to do so. Donning the prophet's mantle, especially by pastors, is tempting but dangerous business, as we've just seen this election year. Isaiah was a prophet. Jeremiah was a prophet. Ezekiel was a prophet; and Amos and Hosea and Micah and Zechariah and most of all Jesus Christ. But the age of prophecy is past. God has not called spokesmen to declare as false prophets have that the trade centers were God's punishment upon us, or that the war in Iraq is a holy war, or that God is going to rain sulfur on San Francisco for its moral deviancy.

Isaiah knew that God would punish Assyria, but for us to declare that god is punishing us or he is not is false prophecy. But we need not go so far. We need not don the prophet's mantle. For the rule inheres in God's moral ordering of his world. Excess and mismanagement cannot and will not stand. Secular historians document the exact same thing and conclude that history repeats itself or is cyclical, but they don't fully account for it. Why will excess and mismanagement not stand? We may simply conclude that they are incompatible with God's moral ordering of his world.

But the question then becomes what are we to do about it? The national and global economy? Climate change? The health crisis? These are systemic problems complex beyond comprehension. If I don't understand them fully, I'd wager the experts don't either? So what can we do?

We can begin to live simply. We can scale down. We can cut back. We can economize. We can share. We can sacrifice. Yes, it will prepare us for what lies ahead, but more importantly, much more importantly, it jibes with God's moral ordering of his world. It is his purpose and will for us. It is the posture from which we live in right relationship with one another, larger society, and the world. And we can begin today. We need not wait for anyone else to take the lead. We can take the lead right now.

We really need only look where we should have had our eyes fixed all along – to Jesus Christ, whose humility puts our hubris to shame, and who reminds us that nothing is decked as finely as the lilies of the field -- except perhaps the lilies that sprang up in the Garden of Gethsemane the morning he was resurrected and trumpeted that we must not lose hope, that his way will triumph. Amen