

Leader-Telegram Quality of Life Times
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We in Wisconsin and the world are in a Lenten wilderness of financial anxiety. Especially for people of faith, for whom financial decisions are moral decisions, these are stressful times. Some of our leaders and our neighbors seem to want to turn this around, and say that moral decisions are financial decisions; that what is moral is what costs us the least. Rule by balance sheets and profit-and-loss statements. By valuing people by their production than by who they are. By basing spending decisions on the calculus of their fiscal merits than on human dignity or the quality of life of those affected.

We are obsessed with money. And rightly so: we use it buy our homes and food, to run businesses, to build roads and schools, to protect our country, to take vacations, buy medicine, and support the mission of our religious and artistic institutions. For some of us, it is in short supply right now. But we are so much more than our assets or lack thereof. People are so much more than credit or debit lines on our ledgers. By quantifying our moral values in economic terms, the rubric of moral good becomes not what is good for the whole society or what offers dignity to the individuals in it, but what saves the most money. When we forget this, problems arise. Justifying layoffs, pay cuts, or defunding of programs that people rely on becomes a merely financial one easily defended with pen, paper, and some simple math. It ceases to be the spiritually difficult and moral, communal decision it should be.

The Old Testament prophets, with the weight of the divine law given to Moses on their side,

proclaimed this constantly to a government and a people who valued military might, conspicuous consumption, rich living, and profit at the expense of workers, rather than following the law to protect the weak, take care of orphans, widows, the poor, treat employees' justly, and provide fair legal treatment even for the marginalized.

Thankfully, as bad as things might seem in this world, God's Kingdom's economy works the opposite way. Our Creator values us not because of our productivity but because God's people: gay or straight or in-between, rich or poor, tall or short, black or brown, sick or healthy, man or woman, public or private, self-reliant or needing assistance. Even the least of us. Especially the least of us. Jesus put his life in the loss column to put ours in the profit. Not just a chosen special few, either. He did it for all of us. That's the promise of Easter: the promise that Divine love overcomes all the injustices, labels, value judgments, and shame we hurl onto one another in our politics, our religious fights, and even our budgets.

Hugo Chavez, co-founder of United Farm Workers, said that "to be a man is to suffer for others. God help us to be men." That is the clear witness of scripture, the witness of Jesus, and the witness of Easter – that we were not made to stay in the wilderness. Not us, and especially not our neighbors. In these wilderness times, know that it is not God's intent. God's only intent for us is to live in dignity and the new life of Easter and to form our communities to reflect that.