

The Biggest Bailout in History

September 28, 2008

(Pentecost 20 - Year A)

Philippians 2: 1-13

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

For the past several days, I have been glued to the news about our American economy.

The stock market has experienced huge losses, mortgage backed securities have been hammered, and the President of the United States warns that we could be in for a very long recession.

A plan was put before the United States Congress by Henry Paulson, the Secretary of the Treasury, to stabilize our economy.

This plan is still being finalized, as Republicans and Democrats negotiated well into the night last night.

From what I have read about this financial crisis, the plan that was put forward by Secretary Paulson to rescue our economy has generated an avalanche of public opinion.

And, as of this morning, we still do not know the final details of this 700 billion dollar financial rescue plan.

But what we do know is this:

It is being called "The Biggest Bailout in History."

However, I think that the financial rescue plan that is before our Congress right now - should be called the *second* biggest bailout in history.

Because *the biggest* bailout in history is described by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes:

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.”

You see, the biggest bailout in history is not on Wall Street, but when God emptied himself and was born as a human.

The biggest bailout in history happened when God humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.

The biggest bailout in history happened when God rescued us through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the church, we have a fancy name for God’s rescue plan.

In the church, we call God’s bailout by the name:

“Salvation.”

Or, as my father-in-law from western Kentucky used to say it:

“Sal-VAY-shun.”

After this sermon, we will say the Nicene Creed together.

In the Nicene Creed, we will say the phrase:

“For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven.”

Those words are so church-y, that sometimes the words just glaze over us.

However, I think that when we say those words today, we should be thinking in our minds:

“For us and to bail us out, he came down from heaven.”

However, if God has bailed us out,

What has God rescued us from?

One of the pat answers that we hear is that God rescues us from hell.

However, I think that you know me well enough to know that I don’t

believe that the Christian faith and life is just about what happens after we die.

The Christian faith and life is lived now - on this earth.

I believe that God has emptied himself and humbled himself and died, to rescue us from monotonous and boring lives that are just about

waking up each morning, hitting the snooze button, going to work, then going to bed each night.

God has rescued us from thinking only about ourselves: about our house, our 401(k) plan, our job, our family.

God has rescued us from living as individuals in isolation, in gated communities with security fences.

God has rescued us from lives that are filled with fear - by giving us the courage to empty ourselves and to bail out other people.

In St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, Paul writes:

"Therefore, my beloved...work out your own salvation."

I believe that Paul invites us to work out our own salvation by encouraging us to participate in God's bailout plan.

I believe that Paul invites us to work out our own salvation by emptying ourselves, by humbling ourselves and by rescuing other people in need.

Last fall, my wife, Susan, had left the HEB grocery store on Hewitt Drive, just after sunset.

As she got close to our house, she noticed a car driving very, very slowly through our dark neighborhood.

As Susan arrived home and began unloading the groceries, she noticed that this car was slowly coming down our street - and then stopped in front of our house.

The window of this car rolled down and the man inside the car called out to Susan:

"Can you help me?"

Susan approached the car and saw that an elderly gentleman was driving.

This man told Susan that he had gone out to pick up a few things at the store, then must have taken a wrong turn.

And now, he was disoriented and could not find his way back home.

Susan went into our house and got me to come outside with her.

We asked this man where he lived, but he was flustered and could not remember his address or phone number and he did not have a cell phone with him.

We asked him for his driver's license and looked up his address. He pleaded with us to not tell his wife that he had gotten lost and forgetful - because he was afraid that his family would take away his driver's license.

I got into the man's car and into the driver's seat - and drove him to his house, which was on the other side of Highway 84.

Susan followed behind me in her car - so that I would be able to get home myself.

We delivered this elderly man back to his house - and to his family.

But before he left us, he thanked me, saying:

"I do not know what I would have done if you had not been willing to come out of your house and help me.

And I am eternally grateful that, when I needed it most, you and your kind wife bailed me out."

Because God emptied himself and became human, Susan Fisher was able to empty herself and approach that man's car.

Because God humbled himself, she was able to humble herself and put aside her own safety to help someone else.

Because God has rescued us from the power of death, we were not overcome by fear in rescuing that stranger.

Because of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the greatest bailout in history, we were able to work out our own salvation - by driving an old man home.

And *you* can participate in God's bailout plan by working out your *own* salvation:

Empty yourself - and empty your pockets of the money that you don't really need to live a simple life.

Humble yourself - and spend time with a special needs child.

Die to yourself - and live for those without health insurance, for those living on minimum wage, for those who cannot afford an attorney -

for those who are like Jesus.

The United States Congress has not yet announced the details of the second biggest bailout in history.

But the Apostle Paul has revealed, in his Letter to the Philippians, the details of God's bailout plan:

For us and for our salvation,

God emptied himself,

God humbled himself,

God died for us -

To rescue us from a selfish and isolated and loveless life.

And the cost of God's rescue is not just a mere 700 billion dollars.

The cost of *God's* bailout plan - hangs right above that altar.

AMEN.

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