

FAITH

BY RON BALLARD

LAST MONTH'S LOCKOUT at ports on the West Coast of the United States has had a rather sobering impact on people in California, where I live. This is especially true for those who are integrally involved, such as a friend of mine who is an importer of perishables from Asia. His cargo has been sitting in a ship off the coast, and he's been wondering whether he'll lose a significant investment, which in the current economy might just mean the end of his business. A loss at this time might even compromise his ability to send his daughter to college.

October 10, 2002, Port of Los Angeles, California—trucks line up to load cargo as cranes remove containers from a ship in the background, after West Coast longshoremen returned to work.

in troubled economic times

Since the 80-day cooling-off period that President Bush mandated has gone into effect, most people probably don't feel they're directly affected by the labor lockout. Yet, with the many problems associated with it, such as delays in the unloading of cargo and shipyards jammed with trucks trying to pick up shipments—as well as strikes going on elsewhere in the US and around the world—it's beginning to dawn on people everywhere just how much we are all interconnected in our economy.

The most common reaction here in California is that these labor struggles do not bode well for the US economy, which is already struggling to rebound and which has faced a lot of negative speculation because of the threat of a war in the Middle East. Many people have concerns about their economic future, especially a lot of baby boomers who have their retirement funds tied up in a queasy, volatile stock market. The particular issues in this strike—concerns about jobs, overhead, and profitability, and an industry moving into a new era of technology—underscore the feelings of uncertainty that so many people have.

Life in an age of change

Facing change and uncertainty—both financial and other kinds of uncertainty—is not new, of course. In such times I often think of the experience in the Bible of Abraham, when God called him to leave what was familiar to him, his country, to set out for the Promised Land. Now, who knows how that message came to Abraham. Maybe it was an inner urging, an inner voice that he recognized as God. But whatever way it

came, Abraham obeyed. And that took a lot of faith.

Too often people think of “faith” as something rather dull and rooted in the past, rather than recognizing faith as an adventure. I once read that faith is not so much an anchor, as a hoisted sail. Abraham didn't really know what was out there, what he would find in the new land, but he did know that God was guiding him. And he also knew the nature of God—a God of promise, a God of opportunity, a God of the future as well as of the past.

Trusting God is a little like being a small boy going for a walk with a parent. He might have no idea where he's going. But as long as he's going with his parent, he feels safe, and perhaps a little adventurous. When we're faced with insecurity and uncertainty, it's helpful to realize that there is something that can guide us, that can bring us to *our* promised land.

Thinking beyond ourselves

I have a friend who's an inspiration to me. He has had to change jobs several times in his career, sometimes as the result of companies failing out from under him. Twice, he has had to start over financially. Yet, I've never seen him without a job. He studies Christian Science, and from that study has learned the value of unselfish living. Each time he has been out of a job, he has looked for ways that he can serve others more effectively. I've never seen it fail—no matter where he starts, this soon leads him into something meaningful and profitable. Most recently he started an art program for elders—people con-

fining in nursing homes, and who, through this art program, are now exploring something new about their lives. The program has been so successful that it has had showings in major art museums.

Mary Baker Eddy, who discovered Christian Science in 1866, observed in her major work on healing, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, that “whatever holds human thought in line with unselfed love, receives directly the divine power” (p. 192). My friend's life, much like Abraham's, seems motivated by a love that is not about what he can get from others, but about giving, without thought of himself. And there would certainly seem to be a power guiding his life.

I believe we can help each other get through periods of uncertainty by encouraging one another to have trust and faith in God—in the guiding Principle of our being. That's an adventure, a new way of embracing change, even if we don't precisely know what the outcome will be. We can rely on having ability from God. He will lead us into new and promised lands.

More reliance on God

I like the promise that's given to us in the book of Jeremiah in the Bible: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (29:11). To me, that “expected end” is not always the way I think something should work out, not always the familiar. I think the “expected end” that God promises is the end that blesses *everyone*. Perhaps something totally

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fresh—a win-win situation.

Certainly one of the persistent feelings facing many of us today is that we are vulnerable and that our lives are subject to factors that are outside of our control. But I'm beginning to consider the possibility that maybe that's not so bad. Now, I don't mean that we should get used to feeling that we are the victims of terror or economic turmoil or incurable disease. Certainly no one wants to be liable to attack, but maybe what we should get used to is relying on something deeper in life than mere human ability and intellect. Maybe we could turn these feelings around and recognize that we should be "vulnerable" to divine intelligence and control. Perhaps we could see life in these times as a calling to switch gears from being super-humans to being receptive servants of divine good.

Interestingly, Mary Baker Eddy remarked about the life of Abraham, that he ". . . illustrated the purpose of [divine] Love to create trust in good, and showed the life-preserving power of spiritual understanding" (*Science and Health*, p. 579). Creativity in life is often a matter of holding different or unique perceptions about circumstances. Gaining spiritual understanding is one way of holding a unique perception about life in these times.

Just like Abraham, we can choose to look at our life as under the control of God, under "the life-preserving power of spiritual understanding." We can choose to think more profoundly about what really influences life, and then get on with living it. Imagine the shift in thought patterns that would result from really thinking of ourselves as "vulnerable" to divine Spirit, and then living that way.

All in this together

Once again, one of the lessons of



—PHOTO BY R. P. KONGSTON

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the recent labor unrest is that the actions one person takes affect the lives of all of us. We are interconnected. That point seems to become clearer and clearer as our world becomes smaller and smaller. That can be a good point as well as a challenging one. Why shouldn't good be contagious? Why shouldn't the noble, unselfish actions of some be a blessing to all? Why shouldn't the courage and faith in our lives inspire humanity to answer to a higher intelligence and seek a better way of doing things? The simple answer is that it can, and, in fact, does.

We are interconnected, not because we share the same planet, but because we come from the same di-

vine source, called God. That source acts as a spiritual animus in us. We are either responding to this spiritual motivation and going higher—thereby carrying others with us—or we are ignoring it and contributing to dormancy.

The days are over of believing that what happens "over there" does not affect us or is none of our business. It was never really true. What is true is that great ideas shape great lives. Ideas that come from spiritual understanding. The understanding that it is God's purpose "to create trust in good" will bless our family worldwide. To live these ideas, to put them into play, is a choice every one of us can make.

I once gave a talk in a church in Chicago. When it was built some years before, the members had chosen to build it in a part of the city that was then economically distressed—and that's a real understatement. But build they did, nonetheless, with the intent that they could serve the community. And it wasn't long before economic vitality began to reappear in that section of the city. Businesses returned; downtown living space was built and inhabited; walking areas were developed.

Now, some might credit that turnaround to any number of factors. But I wouldn't discount the fact that great ideas shape our lives. That church congregation loved its community enough to believe that divine good is contagious—that intelligence from God opens us to new possibilities.

Faith is a hoisted sail, moving everyone aboard this "ship" of life into new waters. We are interconnected. And it is much easier to lift each other up because of our interconnectedness, which stems from one source—God—whose purpose really is "to create trust in good." ✧

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