

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany
Year C – Revised Common Lectionary
January 17, 2010
St. James' Episcopal Church, Pullman, WA
The Rev. Mary Beth Rivetti, Rector

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11; Earthquake in Haiti

Friday evening, as my granddaughter Jazimin was getting settled in from her flight from Salt Lake City, we went looking online for news updates from Haiti. We found a video of a reporter waiting and watching as an 11 year-old girl, just a little older than Jazimin, waited for rescue from the building that had toppled on her. Like Jazimin, this little girl wore glasses, and had skinny legs – even more skinny than my beanpole Rivetti grandchild. The stirring drama seemed to end on a happy note as the reporter came back after dark to report that she had been taken from the rubble to a first-aid station. But then came the sad news. After being trapped for so many hours, dehydrated, no doubt suffering from internal injuries, the young girl had died. The first-aid station had been inadequate to help her; the nearest facility was over two hours away. She died as her desperate family tried to race away; she died before they could get her out of Port-au-Prince. That is a story that is being repeated over and over; hundreds of thousands of times. With the infrastructure so badly damaged, and infrastructure that was hardly functional before the earthquake, those who are not killed outright in the disaster risk death from exposure, starvation; disease; untreated wounds, and now violence as survivors fight for drop of water, a bit of food.

Why does God let things like this happen? I've heard that question this week, and many people are no doubt wondering that. What kind of God lets this happen; what kind of God can't stop this sort of disaster? Some have found a simple answer – notoriously the Rev. Pat Robertson claims that this is the punishment of a just God for the pact with the devil the people of Haiti entered into when they fought for independence from the French in 1804. To which the Devil replied in a letter published in the Minneapolis Star-Tribune that he appreciated Pat's continuing efforts to characterize God as mean, unforgiving, gleefully bringing down violence and destruction – keep up the good work. But the Devil was disturbed nonetheless that Pat would confuse Haiti with those who had made a pact with the Devil.

If I had a thing going with Haiti, there'd be lots of banks, skyscrapers, SUVs, exclusive night clubs, Botox -- that kind of thing. An 80 percent poverty rate is so not my style. Nothing against it -- I'm just saying: Not how I roll.

You're doing great work, Pat, and I don't want to clip your wings -- just, come on, you're making me look bad. And not the good kind of bad. Keep blaming God. That's working. But leave me out of it, please. Or we may need to renegotiate your own contract.¹

We wondered the same thing when the Tsunami hit at Christmastime three years ago. When Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast. When the Typhoon devastated Myanmar. When fires raged through Southern California. We ask that question when we see the effects of war and famine in the Sudan, when we watch unending conflict centered in the holy places of our faith.

Where is God when that happens? The people of God asked that question when their city was laid waste after a devastating siege; women raped, starving, scraping for food, eating the bodies of their dead children; men forced into slavery, the leadership deported to a foreign land. The image of that loss found voice in the prophetic language of Jeremiah and Isaiah, as the holy city Jerusalem became the

¹ Lily Coyle, letter to the editor in the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, January 14, 2010; cited through the NPR News Blog by Frank James

image of the abandoned wife of God, and then the wife that God reclaims. Even in praising God, there is a complaint – where were you? Look what happened to your people! How could you do that? Even in praising the one who promises the restoration of God's Spouse to the gleaming diadem, the bride of God, the one who is no longer abandoned but loved is that nagging complaint that once God did abandon the people God loved. Even in the praise is the challenge to God. The ability of God's people always to be in conversation with God, to ask that question, and to act.

How amazing that today our scripture readings would be filled with the wondrous promise of abundance for all God's people. The heart of our psalm is the promise that in God is the feast, in God is the river of delight. These are the words that sustain us all – whether we are here challenged by the economic uncertainty of the recession and the fear of losing a job, a house, our health, or whether we are grieving the loss of a loved one and wondering if there will ever be joy again – these are the words that promise God's vision for us all is one of abundance, extravagant over the top joy. And this is the vision we hold out now as we look at the utter contrast in the life of the people of Haiti.

Standing at the center of the story in Cana is the mother of Jesus. We never hear her name in John's Gospel, but she shows up here and at the end of the story, when Jesus commends her to the other unnamed one – the beloved disciple – who takes her home with him. Not now, he replies with irritation. This is not my time yet. And she acts as if he hadn't said a word. Not now – but being his mother, the first of the beloved disciples, she showed us what to do. Push, be confident in a good outcome. The wedding is the right time for Jesus to disclose the truth about where he has come from, about who has sent him. The wedding is the image of the world that God proclaims for us all – joyous, abundance, celebration, enduring love. The promise that God offers us all – the promise that Jesus is here to demonstrate. And the mother of God, shows us that sometimes even the Word of God, God made flesh, the Lord, needs a nudge. Needs to see what has to happen. They are running out of wine.

Lord God, we are nudging you earnestly this week. They are out of wine. They are out of the most basic of necessities. Your children are in need.

We all have been visited by the Holy Spirit – marked as Christ's own in baptism. Not just Linda and Gary and Randi who were baptized here last week, but Isabella Visger who was baptized in September, and you and you and every one of you who was able to promise to follow Jesus as our Lord. Paul tells us we can't agree to that statement unless the Holy Spirit is with us. So we have the power. Now what? We have a number of gifts.

Our Social Justice and Outreach Ministry Team is meeting after the 10am service to talk about the ways we can concretely be of service. Right now what is needed is money – money to support the work of Episcopal Relief and Development which is already there working with the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti to gather survivors and provide food and water and basic care. Money to support the work of Rotary International as they provide ShelterBoxes – tents and basic necessities for survivors to sustain them while rebuilding gets underway.

Money is something that is easy for some of us to provide – not so easy for others who are living close to the margin. So perhaps you can come out and park cars during the football season to help raise funds. Perhaps you can work with others in the parish on various fund-raising activities, or join those in the community who are doing so. We have a variety of gifts. This is our opportunity to put them to good use.

In this week when we have the opportunity to celebrate the life and ministry, the spiritual gifts of

Martin Luther King, Jr – we can look at his own embrace of issues of poverty and race. His last trip to Memphis was to support the garbage workers in their strike. Their right to be called men and not boys. Their right to a living wage. Right off our shores for as long as we have been a nation is the half-island nation Haiti that has been a sign of our own troubled history: a nation freed by a former slave, a nation of former slaves just off the shores of a nation that fought its own bloodiest conflict over slavery. Haiti is among the poorest nation in the western hemisphere – just off our shores.

The lines of the psalm that we sang today contain the words that faithful Jews recite whenever they put on their prayer shawl. Let us say them together now as we don our spiritual moment of prayer, as we enter into our prayer, and as we enter into that space of prayer, let us nudge God.

How priceless is your love, O God! *
your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings.

They feast upon the abundance of your house; *
you give them drink from the river of your delights.

For with you is the well of life, *
and in your light we see light.

In this shawl of prayer, here are words that have been written by a contributor to the online Text This Week webpage, a meditation on the events of this week:

The Wedding
Terry L. Chapman

when the wine runs out
the party's just begun

but first let thirst deepen
on dry soul's tongue and

the face of proud host whose
plans fall short redden a shade more

pause while the guest's murmurs
rise over the mundane drone

give the knowing mother a moment
to garner the courage to ask

let a tear fall from the cheek
of the bride in her inconsummation

for life happens on the threshold
between gasp and grasp

when time stands still
and the guests become silent

and in this pregnant pause

the Future asks for fresh containers

to fill with new wine which
too will run out but leaves

a taste on lips never again quenched
by earth's fruit longing for the

Day when they will thirst no more ²