

Second Sunday after Epiphany

As we come together this morning we find safety in this beautiful space -- the coffee pots are perking away in the Parish Hall and sweets and savories are being laid out for us. Each of us, if we chose, have had some breakfast before we arrived or we might be planning a brunch after the service. The city streets are sleepy and peaceful. Even if we have heard dismal news from the doctor or if the Christmas bills are bigger than anticipated we come to this sanctuary for strength to face the days ahead and for thanksgiving for our blessings. But listen to the words from Isaiah -- "The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name [Jerusalem] that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her ..."

Haiti is termed Forsaken as the Episcopal Cathedral's roof has fallen in, the streets are clouded with dust and people's personal papers fluttering underfoot and they are lined with corpses and water and food are so scarce that there is violence with machetes as people are fighting for scraps and drops. There are broken hospitals with no doctors working as there are no supplies. And our tendency is to feel so overwhelmed by this tragedy that we say to one another, "I can't look at the TV, it's too sad. The pictures break my heart! But listen again to the words from Isaiah -- "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her ..."

In my life after ordination people who had known me before would sometimes tell me stories they had never shared in the past. A business colleague once shamefacedly shared with me with me his regret about a tenth anniversary dinner. He had taken his wife to a very elegant restaurant in Manhattan and as they sat in a window seat, sipping their champagne, a beggar knocked on the glass and gestured that he was hungry. Taken aback the man hesitated and then called the waiter and asked him to close the curtains. Years later he still carried that guilt with him and felt the need to tell me. We can change the channel but we cannot pull the curtain on Haiti's suffering because our hearts will not forget either the pain of the Haitian pictures or our own lingering guilt.

Haiti is the poorest country in our hemisphere and the earthquake

that has savaged its capital city may claim as many lives as the Indian Ocean tsunami five years ago. This has happened on our very doorstep and despair is everywhere. Not only in Haiti itself but in the newscasts and the politicians' reactions -- some saying Haiti may not be salvageable. We cannot say this. For we have heard the promise -- "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her ..."

We may not turn our eyes away in this season of Epiphany. As Christians we are called to suffer with our brothers and sisters and to find ways to use our blessings to obey the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. We may not sigh and call the land of Haiti forsaken and give up. In his epistle to the Corinthians Paul calls on that congregation to recognize the blessings among them. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good "

The poorest of us and the sickest of us here at Grace are vastly richer and incredibly more healthy than our fellows in Haiti but it is the same spirit that empowers us to spread the light of Christ to the world. On the bitter cold nights last month could we in our warm houses forget the homeless in our city?

Our gifts may not be evident to us and may seem completely inadequate -- only a few of us have medical skills ; hardly any have enough money to make individual contributions to fund an airlift or re-build a hospital. But remember that Jesus spoke only of a drink of water given to the least of these as serving him. Together as the body of Christ, with our comparative material wealth and the strength our shared faith we can use the gifts of the spirit to help our Haitian family.

Haiti is the newest diocese in the Episcopal Church -- the newest and the largest. ... also the second oldest republic in the western hemisphere.

The church in Haiti is not wealthy but it is spiritually strong, and deeply engaged in the healing for which there was already such a great need in that country. Though new as a diocese, the mission of the church there is very old, and many dioceses throughout the American church have relationships of long standing with Haiti. This close family tie is a godsend in this terrible moment, as it makes it easier for us all to help. Colorado has many special connections with Haiti and that bond calls on us to pray constantly and to support in both prayer and generosity the relief efforts of all of us.

Because of our own human natures and because of the enormity of the pain in this disaster we tend to excuse ourselves for doing nothing because we can't fix everything. So it seems fitting that today's Gospel tells that story of Mary and Jesus and his first miracle of turning water into wine in Cana. In a gesture of concern and generosity Mary worried that the wedding party is about to be spoiled because the wine is running out. When she asks her son to help out, his answer sounds all too human ... "What concern is that to us? My time has not yet come."

Now some scholars write about this parable citing Jesus' need to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit and they discuss the divine schedule for Jesus to enter fully into his ministry. However when I read these words in the context of the needs in Haiti I think we can see that in spite of Jesus' apparent reluctance to share his gift with the wedding guests, his time *had* come. The gift of the miraculous wine brought joy to the celebration and he moved on from there. The people of Haiti *are* our concern and *our* time has come to share our many gifts and blessings with them.

Our collect for today speaks of the season of light and we prayed, "Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen."

Each of us carries this light within us and the message of Christmas and Epiphany will die with the dead needles from the tree and the crumpled gift wrap if we fail to give thanks for the light in our lives and every day to spread the light to the world around us.

You will learn more from Bishop O'Neill's letter about the Diocese's plans for doubling our donations and other ways to reach out to Haiti so now let us end with his closing words : "As you consider your gift to this campaign, I encourage you to keep in mind the economy of God. Remember that love only exists when love is shared; that when love is shared, love is multiplied; and that when love is shared completely, love is multiplied completely. During this season of light, please be the Light." Amen.