

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany
Year C
January 17, 2009
Isaiah 62:1-5 and John 2:1-11

In the name of One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

You all have been listening, reading and watching the same news I have.

"You go into every building, you go down every corner, and there are people wailing, crying, bandaged up, and there are no doctors to help them," they say.

We hear that our friends and colleagues have lost a son, a mother, a spouse.

We turn desperately to Jesus Christ and call out to him anxiously on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Haiti: *They have no wine.*

We see someone in need.

We see a whole city or an entire country in need. And we want to help.

"Jesus," we want to say, "help these people."

"Jesus, don't you see what we see?"

"This is much worse than a hurricane," say the news reporters. "There's no water. There's nothing. Thirsty people are going to die."

Jesus Christ. *They have no wine.*

We speak as the mother of the Lord, only the stakes are so so much higher.

Streets have buckled. The palace has collapsed. Buildings that were several stories high are now described as a mound of pancakes, layer upon layer of concrete with only the smallest of spaces to hold the hopes and prayers of the entire world.

Jesus Christ. *They have no wine.*

And then the seemingly harmless words become awful: "What concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

The language of the Gospel is jarring. We read or hear these lines of Scripture - screaming of divine indifference - and we, like those we long to help, are shaken.

Today is a day when many of us feel vulnerable, as if the ground below us has fallen away.

This has been a week when we have witnessed buildings, dreams and faith crumble into a heap of dust and ruin - whether far away in Haiti or here in the very chambers of our hearts.

Therefore we have no time for Jesus' response to his mother.

"What concern is that to you and to me," he says. "My hour has not yet come."

No Jesus you are wrong. You have to be wrong.

For many of us, the hour is, in fact, now.

We need God to see what we see. We need God to act.

These images of destruction are all around us - in high definition. There is no escaping the tragedy that has been visited upon our neighbors.

For those of us who cannot respond on the ground, we have just to hold the images. But we can't hold them by ourselves. We cannot take all that pain into ourselves. We must share it, tenderly and reverently turn it over to hands more powerful than ours.

We have to bring the pain we see around us to God's attention. So we surround the people with prayer and hold the images, the stories and the people in our hearts where they dwell with God.

Dear God. *They have no wine. They have nothing.*

No shelter. No food. No water.
No home as they knew it.
No future as they had imagined it.

Life has suddenly been reduced to the dust that has settled all around them.

"Long before this tragedy," our president told the people of Haiti, "daily life itself was often a bitter struggle. And after suffering so much for so long, to face this new horror must cause some to look up and ask, have we somehow been forsaken?"

It is a question that people in and out of Haiti will ask. Is the country forsaken? Are people who experience pain and suffering forsaken by God?

Tragedy seems to visit our world with an awful regularity, bringing a darkness even the light of burning tires cannot penetrate.

- Hurricane Mitch which devastated Honduras
- New York City on Sept 11th
- The Christmas day tsunami in Indonesia
- Hurricane Katrina

It can seem at times that an entire population has been forsaken - and the land suddenly desolate.

It certainly feels that way today.

Yet, we sit here in this sanctuary because we are a people of hope. A people guided by the light of the star that hangs above your heads.

We know our story and it goes like this:

The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

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,
and your land Married;
for the LORD delights in you,
and your land shall be married.

The people of Israel had known desolation.
They had felt forsaken.
They had been hungry.
They knew a grief so intense that it was passed from generation to generation.
They knew exile.
They understood loneliness.
They knew what it meant to feel as if God was far far away.

The hour had come.

And we hear in crystal clear imagery God's final response.

God had given a new name to His people: My Delight Is in Her.

Today we cry out to God as if...

As if God isn't there in Port-au-Prince buried under the rubble.

As if God isn't there in the makeshift hospitals when the doctors go home.
As if God isn't there in the airplanes filled with aid and caregivers scared to death.
As if God doesn't desperately want to see Haiti live into a name other than desolate, an identity other than forsaken.

As if we don't remember our history.
Our story.
Our promise.
Our salvation.

As if we don't remember that life comes out of death.

As if we don't remember that civil society was strengthened after Hurricane Mitch struck Honduras and the new conversations which began following 9-11. As if we don't remember enemies in Indonesia building peace in the aftermath of the tsunami and the new awareness which resulted from Hurricane Katrina.

In this morning's paper, a development expert says about Haiti: "It's terrible to look at it this way, but out of crisis often comes real change. The people and the institutions take on the crisis and bring forth things they weren't able to do in the past." (Ross Anthony, the Rand Corporation's Global Health Director, in www.washingtonpost.com)

The people of Haiti will survive this disaster, but they will need our help. Their country may even be stronger following the years of recovery that is before them. But they will need our help.

And it seems as if they are getting it. We know they have our prayer. And we know money is flooding into ERD, the Red Cross and Oxfam.

For this abundant generosity we are all thankful.

And we remember our story. A story founded on love abundant:

Long ago in Cana of Galilee, at the end of a long day of celebration, Jesus turned water into wine. No one's life or health was at stake. No one's country was in ruins. Of all places, a wedding feast was the site of Jesus' first miracle. If one would think that miracles are numbered, it sounds ridiculous. Why would Jesus perform this miracle then?

Well for one, because the need was brought to Jesus' attention.

And also, because it was a sign.

A sign that in Jesus' Kingdom there will be abundant drink, abundant light, abundant life, abundant love.

As he inaugurates his Kingdom, Jesus will be overzealous, over-generous, over-willing, extravagant.

With healing, with feeding, with raising up, with new wine.

May those of us who have tasted the sweetness of the miracle of life that this wine offers, continue to share it with those today who have no wine.

Who have no water.

Who have no shelter, but their faith in Jesus Christ and His followers.

And let us remember God's promise to us and pray in the words of today's Psalm:

How precious is your steadfast Love, O God.
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings...
For with you is the fountain of life; and in your light we see light.

Amen.