



Liturgical Day: The 2nd Sunday after Epiphany
Date: January 17, 2010
Sermon Title: God Only Knows

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

It has been a dramatic, shocking, exhausting week for those of us who have spent any time at all looking at images beamed back from Haiti. God's children on that island have suffered so terribly, and our hearts go out to them. I heard someone mention this past week that he felt guilty for watching the images on the evening news, almost as if he were invading the privacy of those who had been hurt. At the same time, he also felt guilty that he could so easily turn off the television and return to the comfort of his own life. I suspect that most of us could identify with him.

We ache for the people of Haiti. And we ache for those neighbors of ours who are there too. As we mentioned in the prayers, a number of people have been in Haiti who are members of local Lutheran churches, or friends of members here at Saint Peter. The few names we mentioned today are but a small representation of the many Christians from our country who have given significantly to the people of Haiti over the years. Some of them are doing their best to get out of harm's way, and return to their families. Others, who have specific skills and abilities that are necessary in a disaster response, will be staying there and working round-the-clock for days to come. We ache for them all.

It is hard to know what to do. Money, of course, is the primary need. In a couple of minutes, I'll invite you to join me in responding with a special offering. As your weekly newsletter tells you, our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has already responded with \$250,000 from our International Disaster Response fund. And our leaders have pledged, on our behalf, that we will be sending in at least another half million before we're done. That will help – we are fortunate to have many people on the ground in Haiti, and systems set up that, even despite the disruption of this disaster, will eventually be of great use in responding to this tragedy. The money that you and I contribute today and in weeks to come through the ELCA will go a long way in making a difference for the people who were affected.

So we give money. Beyond that, it is hard to know what to do. A feeling of helplessness washes over us when we stand in the face of such an awful tragedy. And, indeed, we would be helpless, if we were all on our own. But you and I don't believe that, do we? We don't believe that we are on our own in responding to our brothers' and sisters' need, because we have been given the gift of prayer.

This morning, we pray for the people of Haiti. And as we lift up Haiti and its people in prayer, we entrust them to the care of God, whose love and grace will make a difference. We pray for those whose lives have been so tragically disrupted. We pray for those who have lost their lives. We pray for those who have lost family members and friends; who have lost health and peace; who have lost homes and jobs. We pray for those brave and faithful souls who have journeyed there to try and make a difference. We pray for everybody involved, and we trust that somehow, in the mystery that is our God, our prayers will make a difference in the lives of our friends there.

Before we begin praying, however, we need first to take a look at this morning's Gospel lesson.

LESSONS

ISAIAH 62:1-5

PSALM 36:5-10 (8)

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11

ST. JOHN 2:1-11

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

LORD GOD, SOURCE OF EVERY BLESSING, YOU SHOWED FORTH YOUR GLORY AND LED MANY TO FAITH BY THE WORKS OF YOUR SON, WHO BROUGHT GLADNESS AND SALVATION TO HIS PEOPLE. TRANSFORM US BY THE SPIRIT OF HIS LOVE, THAT WE MAY FIND OUR LIFE TOGETHER IN HIM, JESUS CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR AND LORD.
AMEN.

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God's work. Our hands.

As St. John tells the story, Mary and Jesus and his disciples are attending a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Before the wedding feast concludes, however, they run out of wine. This is pretty embarrassing. Weddings don't come along all that often in Jesus' day, and to host a wedding is a big social responsibility. The bride's parents do their best to make sure everything is perfect. They want to honor their daughter, of course. And they want the townspeople to enjoy celebrating the wedding. But even more, they know that people will be talking about this wedding for months to come. And if something happens to make them look foolish, that will be repeated time and time again by their friends and neighbors. It is pretty embarrassing to run out of wine at a wedding reception.

Now let's stop and think about that for a moment. It is a party. People are having fun. They'll continue to have fun, of course, if the wine runs out. Maybe not for quite as long, but they could certainly carry on. Mary may be worried about the celebration. It may even be that she is thinking her good friends, the parents of the bride, are going to be humiliated if everybody finds out. So this isn't a life-or-death situation. Nonetheless, Mary points out to Jesus that there is a problem. And that's all she does. "They have no wine."

One might speculate that God would be interested in the suffering of the people in Haiti, but not all that concerned about the wedding reception that runs out of wine. One might speculate that God would have much more at stake when tens of thousands of people are injured and killed, than when it looks like a wedding party is going to run its course a few hours earlier than expected. Bottom line: you might imagine God choosing to do something in Haiti, and ignoring the lack of wine at the wedding in Cana.

Truth is, God is concerned about each of these situations. God's heart is moved whenever humans suffer – whether that suffering is something as minor as the lack of wine at a celebration, or something as horrific as the death and destruction of a major earthquake. God is concerned, and invites the faithful to lift all human suffering up in prayer. Jesus' response to Mary at Cana is an indication of God's desire to be involved, no matter how minor, or how superficial the suffering might seem to be. And so we pray, even when what concerns us isn't as epic in scale as what our Haitian neighbors are facing this week.

But this morning's Gospel lesson may have something more to teach us about prayer. I find it very interesting that Mary never tells Jesus what to do. She doesn't say, "Go out and find some wine." or, "Turn some water into wine." or even, "You've got to do something about this." She simply lifts up to him the problem. "They have no wine." She identifies the problem. She brings it to his attention. And she knows in her heart (perhaps even better than he himself does) that he will respond in the way that will be most helpful.

Her prayer is answered, of course. Not only does he provide wine for the wedding ceremony, but it is the finest of wines. However, when we look at this event in the light of St. John's Gospel, we discover that the fact that the wedding wine is replenished has very little to do with what Jesus actually accomplishes that day. This is a far greater miracle than that. It is the first in a series of what St. John calls "signs." Signs of who Jesus is. Signs of what his mission is all about. Signs that will lead people to a faith in him – a faith that will transform them at the core, and leave them looking at the world in an entirely new way.

What Jesus did that day was far more than providing a few jugs of wine. The importance of this story is found in the very last phrase: "... and his disciples believed in him." Mary senses there is a problem and she simply lifts up the situation to Jesus, knowing that he will understand what is wrong, and do something about it. Jesus may have been concerned about the wine as well. But he also knows that these kinds of situations open up all sorts of possibilities, and he uses that event as an opportunity to begin building faith in the hearts of his disciples.

Maybe that is why God is just as interested in the small stuff as in the huge stuff. Maybe it is that God knows that every crisis, whether small or large, creates an opportunity to make a difference.

We're pretty sure we know what the people of Haiti need these days. They need water. They need medical care. They need food. They need shelter. They need help in protecting themselves from decaying bodies and the spread of diseases. They will eventually need help in rebuilding the infrastructure of their country. That's what we see. But I wonder what else God sees. As God goes about providing water and medical care and food and shelter... what else will God provide? Who will be moved by the kindness of

Christians? Who will begin to believe because of the compassion they receive? Who will be inspired to faithful service by being part of the solution for the difficulties in Haiti today? And in what other ways will God use this horrible event to make something good – something sacred – take place?

We really ought to learn a thing or two about prayer from the mother of Jesus. We really ought, like her, to lift up individuals and situations when we are aware that things aren't quite right. But maybe we ought to refrain from assuming that we know what is needed. Maybe, in our prayers, we can remember that God sees far more than we do. And God will provide far more than we can imagine.

So today, we lift up our neighbors in Haiti. We know that there is so much pain and brokenness there. We believe that God knows this much more intimately than we ever can. So, God, be with your people there. Provide them with all that you know they need. And in whatever ways you can use us, put us to work to be your eyes and ears and hands and feet for your children in this broken world.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor

English Text: ⁱ

^{2.1} On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." ⁱⁱ

Greek Text:

^{2.1} Καὶ τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς τρίτης γάμος ἐγένετο ἐν Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας, καὶ ἦν ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐκεῖ· ² ἐκλήθη δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν γάμον. ³ καὶ ὑστερήσαντος οἴνου λέγει ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν· οἶνον οὐκ ἔχουσιν. ⁴ [καὶ] λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου. ⁵ λέγει ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ τοῖς διακόνοις· ὅτι ἂν λέγῃ ὑμῖν ποιήσατε. ⁶ ἦσαν δὲ ἐκεῖ λίθιναι ὑδρίαὶ ἕξ κατὰ τὸν καθαρισμὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων κείμεναι, χωροῦσαι ἀνὰ μετρητὰς δύο ἢ τρεῖς. ⁷ λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· γεμίσατε τὰς ὑδρίας ὕδατος. καὶ ἐγέμισαν αὐτὰς ἕως ἄνω. ⁸ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· ἀντλήσατε νῦν καὶ φέρετε τῷ ἀρχιτρικλίνῳ· οἱ δὲ ἠνεγκαν. ⁹ ὡς δὲ ἐγεύσατο ὁ ἀρχιτρικλίνος τὸ ὕδωρ οἶνον γεγενημένον καὶ οὐκ ᾔδει πόθεν ἐστίν, οἱ δὲ διάκονοι ᾔδεισαν οἱ ἠντληκότες τὸ ὕδωρ, φωνεῖ τὸν νυμφίον ὁ ἀρχιτρικλίνος ¹⁰ καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· πάς ἄνθρωπος πρῶτον τὸν καλὸν οἶνον τίθησιν καὶ ὅταν μεθυσθῶσιν τὸν ἐλάσσω· σὺ τετήρηκας τὸν καλὸν οἶνον ἕως ἄρτι. ¹¹ Ταύτην ἐποίησεν ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐφάνερωσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ. ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at www.elca.org/worship/church_year.

ⁱⁱ St. John 2:1-11, *New Revised Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

ⁱⁱⁱ St. John 2:1-11, *The Greek New Testament*, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).