

Second Sunday After Epiphany  
January 17, 2010

Pastor Julio Cruz-Natal  
Emanuel Lutheran Church (ELCA), Dallas, Texas, USA

*Scriptures: Isaiah 62:1-5, Psalm 36:5-10, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, John 2:1-11*

### **A Wedding in Haiti**

So here's the dilemma for us today. We got our lectionary reading from the gospel. It is the wedding at Cana. Normally we talk about it and we use it in contexts of celebration. It is about joy and blessing; it talks about new things that are about to start. In the context of Epiphany, it is also about God's revelation in Jesus. Verse 11 says that "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." There is music, dance, and wine. Jesus is present. His power is being displayed. There is a party going on and God is about to start a new thing. All this is certainly good news.

And then, because all our preaching has to be contextual and has to take root in our present situation, we have Haiti. I'm sure that you all have heard the facts. The poorest country in the western hemisphere has gone through one of the most devastating natural disasters that we have known. Destruction and suffering have been generalized; no one has been spared. Even the Presidential Palace is in ruins. One can hardly imagine a more dreadful situation. In a place where people barely survive, even what little they have has been destroyed. There is mourning, and wailing, and crying on the streets. People run in panic, but there's nowhere to run, there's nowhere to be safe. It is as if the world is ending.

Now, talk about contrasts. What do we do? Where do we go? What reflection can we have? This is one of those situations where one has to wonder, where is God in all of this? Not because we don't believe that God exists, but because we don't know where to look. Is he in the celebration and festivity, or is he in the suffering and pain? I'm sure that we all have had those contrasts before. We have had times of happiness when we have felt so very blessed by God. It is in those times when we have no doubts about how good God is. We feel provided for and we feel like the power of God is being manifested. So we sing and praise and say alleluias. But then, we also have had times of sorrow. We have gone through those occasions in our lives where everything seems to be going the wrong way. We strive to remain faithful, so we think about God's compassion and caring love. In those times we are reminded of Jesus' own passion, suffering and even death. When we suffer, we tend to look for refuge in Jesus cross, which is certainly the place where we can go because it is where the power of God is manifested more clearly.

So we know all that. We know that God is the God of blessing and joy. We also know that God is the God of refuge in the times of suffering. My confusion today is, and it might be your confusion as well, which way do we go? We have just ended the time of Christmas when the whole Christian world celebrates God's birth in baby Jesus. Now in the season of Epiphany we celebrate God's revelation to all of humanity. It is about being able to see God everywhere. He is being revealed to shepherds, and magi, and even to

powerful King Herod who trembles at the idea of a new king being shown to the world. On the other hand we just can't ignore the present situation. There is so much pain and agony. Hard as we try, we can't make sense of the deeply sad situation that the people of Haiti are going through.

Now, when you come to think of it, this is not so new. The fact of the matter is that we live in a world marked by very deep contrasts. I mean, don't we see this happening everyday? Haven't we heard before that the majority of the population around the world lives under conditions of poverty and scarcity? Billions of people go about without education, a safe roof over their heads, assurance of a meal for tomorrow, and many of the other basic things needed for life. That happens alongside a different portion of the world where there are plenty of resources to go by. I mean, isn't it a contrast that while millions die out of hunger in this country we put our pets on diets because they are too fat? It is also a fact of the United Nations, that today 20% of the population of the world uses 80% of its resources. That means that 80% of the world population has to live on 20% of the world resources. That is indeed a deep contrast and one that is all around us everyday.

Don't get me wrong, my brothers and sisters, this is not a sermon about making us feel guilty, although there would be plenty of reason for that. What we want to do though, is to find God in all of this. That's no easy task by the way. We have to resist the temptation to provide easy answers for a very complicated situation. The fact of the matter is that when people suffer deep pain like the one the people in Haiti are going through, and like the pain and suffering so many millions others are having right now around the world, is difficult to find God.

When Jesus was in Cana, there was a wedding; there was a celebration, a party. And this is no ordinary party, this was a big deal. In the first century, a typical wedding feast lasted for an entire week. It was a communal celebration that was often characterized by the sharing of gifts and the abundance of food and wine. Wine in fact was the very ever present staple at the table. It is a symbol of God's provision and blessing for the couple, the families involved and all of the community that celebrated with them.

Perhaps the wedding we hear about in the gospel is only on its third day, which means there is plenty more celebration to come. But, how can they celebrate if there is no wine? Again, the wine being a symbol of happiness and joy, this means that the blessings the couple are counting with for their lives together is being threatened by the lack of it. The jars are empty, they are bone dry. There should be more joy to share, but they had nothing to celebrate with.

So when Jesus turned the water into wine it is a symbol of a promise. God was promising, right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, that there would be good wine to celebrate with. That, in spite of what Jesus himself knows is about to happen. He is about to start a ministry that will bring him in confrontation with many. He will be challenged, ridiculed, and persecuted. Even to his disciples, he is saying that the challenges ahead will require great sacrifice from them. If the introduction to the gospel of John is any indication, Jesus knew from the get go that he would be rejected and even put to death.

The question to answer is, is Jesus then not to do what he was sent to the world to do? Is the threat of pain and suffering obstacle big enough to stop God's plan of salvation? Can

we keep God from doing his will of deliverance, and forgiveness of sins? No! God will turn things around. He will work through pain and suffering. He will use death to bring life. He will turn defeat into victory. He will not let his children die out of their own sins. He will justify those who believe. He will bring about a new creation through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. He will bring new and better wine.

I'm sure that the couple being married in Cana was afraid. What are we going to do? How can we continue? Our life together is being challenged because our jars are dry; we don't have wine to celebrate with. Jesus provision of new and even better wine is the way in which God says, that even in the most desperate of situations his power to heal, and to end sadness, and to restore, and to bring about his blessings will not be impeded.

You see, what the empty jars of wine are to the wedding is what the cross is for God. It would seem like an insurmountable challenge. It's finished; there's nothing else we can do. But God turned the cross into an instrument of salvation. Others thought it was the end of Jesus' ministry. As it turned out it became the beginning of a proclamation that has lasted to our day.

I want to propose that there has been a wedding being celebrated in Haiti. You see, we hear all too much bad stuff about Haiti. About the poverty, and the chaos, and the lack of a good government and whatnot. We even heard a preacher this week saying that a supposed pact with the devil done hundreds of years ago has something to do with the earthquake. Be very careful with that! I don't think that's the way God works.

Anyway, enough of looking for negative stuff to explain what has happened. I wonder if we can think about the thousands of people who have been working hard to help those in need in Haiti. I wonder if we can think of the hundreds of Christian missions that insist on preaching hope in the midst of desperate situations. I wonder if we can think of good people trying to bring about change. Because that's what has been happening in Haiti for the most part of the last couple of hundred of years. They've been there working, ministering, helping and fighting the odds. Those are reasons to celebrate.

Now, all of the sudden the jars have grown dry and the future seem bleak. What are we going to do? Stop the work? Finish the wedding? Send everybody home? No! When Jesus went to the cross it didn't all stop there. He came back from the dead. He resurrected to show that God still had power to heal, to forgive, to give life. When the wine ran out in Cana, He made new and better wine so that there would be reason to continue the feast.

Now that the future and livelihood of the good people in Haiti are called into question by this terrible tragedy, God will not stop the poor, and the neglected, and the outcast. As we speak thousands of people are going to this devastated corner of the world to be the stewards who put water in those dry bone jars. They are bringing their talents, their offerings, their hands. God will convert that into new and better wine and so that there will be reason to continue the feast. We are not negating the pain and suffering that these, our brothers and sisters, are going through. The devastation is immense and the weeping is being heard around the world. But it is also true that there is hope. Hope of a better and sweeter time when they will enjoy the new wine that God is about to bring. Let's keep our hearts open and our hope alive. God will bring new wine. Amen.