

## **SERMON: Church of the Holy Spirit, Wayland, MA - January 17, 2010**

### **Sermon for January 17, 2010 - Church of the Holy Spirit, Wayland - The Rev. Dr. Frederick P. Moser, Rector**

The gospel is every host's worst nightmare. Will there be enough? What happens if the refreshments run out? Maybe Miriam Stoddard has had this nightmare. Suppose the coffee runs out and there is only water for Coffee Hour. In any event, this is also God's nightmare: suppose the supplies, the food and drink that sustain God's children, run out.

God's nightmare became reality last week in Haiti in the overwhelming aftermath of the earthquake. The enormity of loss seems to test our faith; we are stirred to compassion and want to respond however we can. But, the nightmare suddenly so visible in Haiti has to do with a lot more than the earthquake. As any eighth grade earth science student could tell us, places all over the world sit on fault lines and shifting tectonic plates. Places in this country do; we do even here in the Boston area. The difference in Haiti is extreme poverty. Haiti is among the poorest countries in the world, if not the poorest, and we have known about this even longer than we have known about fault lines and tectonic plates. And, therein lays the cause of God's nightmares long before the disaster of this past week.

The horrible, heart-wrenching tragedy we see going on in Haiti now in the aftermath of the earthquake is exactly why the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals are the mission priority of the Episcopal Church, and why we ask our parishioners to support projects to address them – things like the Millennium Development Goal fundraising concerts we have been doing here for several years with the Rivers School Conservatory and the ecumenical benefit concerts of our own choir. For exactly this reason our Episcopal Church's first commitment is to advance the Millennium Development Goals: so that we are not merely responding constantly to catastrophic disasters – as critical as it is that we do respond – but that we address the root reasons why these things so devastate places like Haiti.

The very first of those Millennium Development Goals is “to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.” Earthquakes are extremely destructive things. But, the loss of life, property, and infrastructure is almost infinitely greater in places of extreme poverty. I have not had the opportunity to go to Haiti, but I have been to some of the poorest places on some of its neighboring islands. They're not Ocho Rios. They are places put together in the most flimsy way with the cast off debris of the United States and other richer countries. For next to nothing – sometimes even for nothing – their people pick the cane that sweetens most of our processed foods, the bananas and coffee that we are aghast to pay more than nominal prices for, and even the ganja that feeds the rich world's drug habits. What a nightmare the earthquake must have been

for all those poor people; but, what a nightmare the poverty there has been for longer than any of them were ever alive.

Left only to us human beings there never will be enough food and drink for the wedding feast. The nightmare will recur; the host will run out of supplies, and there will always be a crisis. But, with Jesus, if we can recognize the ethic in the Gospel, it can be different, and there can be enough for everyone. The gospel is all about transforming scarcity into abundance. It is about reorganizing our world and redistributing its resources. And, it is about change; it is about changing us and our changing the way the world works. The gospel is not about reviving old ways and transplanting them to new situations. It is about the death of old ways, and the birth of new and different, more just, paths to the human future. It is we, though, who have to do the transforming, and, to that end, Jesus seeks to transform us. We are like the water that Jesus can turn into new wine when we recognize that we have come to the end of the feast as we knew it, and the feast can only go on with more than enough for everybody if we change.

Transformed from water into wine, we are Jesus, the Body of Christ in the world. We are here because the world needs transforming, and we are here to do that. God is still the host, but we now are Jesus, charged to devise ways that food and drink will always be available for everyone who comes to the feast. The world is the water that we, as Christ in it, have been called in Baptism to change into wine. The host needs us to do this ministry. Yes, the host needs us to send everything we can to do everything that can be done to help all those poor people who survived the earthquake and are now in even more desperate situations than they were before. But, what the host really needs us to do is change the way we live and the entitlement we think we have to a disproportionate share of the world's blessing.

In the larger sense, what Jesus did at the wedding feast was turn despair to hope, doubt to faith, death to life. As Christ's Body of those who have been transformed by his life, death, and resurrection, we are here to do the same for others. In the Burial liturgy, sadly said now for so many not all that far from here and hauntingly close in connection to us, there is an affirmation deeply connected to what Jesus does in the story of the wedding feast at Cana. In the preface to the Eucharistic prayer at a funeral we say, "For to your faithful people, O Lord, life is changed, not ended." The ordinary water is changed; not gone but changed into wine, something different, more, than before. The common made holy; the day of loss redeemed; what ended horrifically resurrected to new and different life. May the works of resurrection Christ has accomplished in us be sources of grace for our ministry to change the world.