

The Second Sunday After the Epiphany  
Year C

*Dreaming the Dreams of God*

Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalm 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

He stood atop the parapet and looked out over the city. It wasn't exactly one of the seven wonders of the world. Clusters of stone houses ran along its streets, which were really little more than dirt paths, worn deep by the centuries. There were whole sections of the city that had never been rebuilt, where children played war upon piles of rubble and would occasionally find some ancient piece of glitter, an old bronze tool handle, a broken shard of pottery, a melted clump of copper. He remembered as a boy, turning over some of those heavy stones and wondering at the fading black signs of a long ago fire, set by the invaders as they pillaged. The people had returned to Jerusalem and Jerusalem to the people, but it was a pathetic return. There was a temple, true, but it was nothing compared to the temples of the other nations: just a simple, columned building, whose priests went about their duties with a grim acceptance that this was as good as it was going to be. Everyone tried to pretend that it was okay, that they were a simple humble people, grateful that at least they were back in their own land.

But it was not okay with him. And it shouldn't be okay with the God who brought them back. He had been reading the old scrolls of the prophet, the ones the priests had hidden away in desert caves, where the dry air preserved their words across the ages. "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones."

Well that may have been a great encouragement to a people whose world was falling apart, who were about to be carted

away as the spoil of Empire, but reality was sickeningly different. The city was hardly more than a large village, her past glories still past. It was hard to believe that this place was once so beautiful that it took away the breath of the Queen of Sheba herself. It was a grim, sad place, so beaten down and poor that nobody even expected things to get better. People were grateful to be alive and to have something in their bellies at night. Hope was just a word, a word that people didn't even use anymore. There was no milk and no honey flowing anywhere in that grimy, broken country.

He made a fist and pounded the rock wall in front of him. Where was God? Why were the Jewish people still stuck in this place between life and death, between promise and fulfillment? He watched the little splits in his knuckles grow red with his blood. Why God? Why have you just left us like this?

Then something inside him stirred. He felt some improbable joy rising up into his throat. He tasted like pomegranate juice and sniffed jasmine on the summer breeze. He looked out over the city again and could see the walls rising up strong and proud, the dome of the Temple shining gold in the afternoon sun, the streets bustling with people—people from everywhere, a throng so deep it burst forth from the walls and covered the hillside of Zion. I will pray for this, he thought. I will pray it and tell other people to pray it. We will remind Yahweh of his promises. We will do this and do this and do this, until it happens. Until we become Beulah Land, until God himself comes among us like our Bridegroom. Until we stand before him, white and radiant, like the one he loves. I will not be silent. And it will come, it will come. I will not be silent, God.

We don't know his name, but we know he wrote the last few chapters of the book we now call Isaiah. We know he had the faith to see what Israel could become, a place where all people were welcome to build the house of God, where justice was done, where people prayed and it showed. And he did it in a place where prayer seemed to have stopped working, where poetry had stopped being written and songs no longer sung,

where nobody saw much of God in anything. Where the mass of people lived lives that were nasty, brutish and short.

It was a place much like Haiti. After this week's devastation in that tiny nation its hard to think that suffering could get any worse for this tiny half-archipelago that sits 150 miles off the coast of Key West. But the truth is, Haiti has been hanging on a cross since 1492.

Indulge me in a bit of history here. Christopher Columbus landed in Haiti, and found an island rich in resources and people. But the Spanish hunger for gold was not easily slaked, and the Conquistadores soon began importing captured Africans to work the mines, and later the tobacco and indigo plantations. It wasn't just that the Spanish conquered and killed the native people, even their breath brought death: the first smallpox outbreak in the New World nearly wiped out the native population in 1507. Within a couple of generations, the natives were extinct.

The following centuries saw the island of Hispaniola divided between France and Spain as the outrageous fortunes of Empire were slung to and fro. But by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a new wind of human freedom was blowing. In the English colonies of the New World, Thomas Jefferson wrote that all men were created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. He saw no irony in his own possession of men and women whom he himself endowed with no rights at all. But in France, where cries of "liberty, equality and fraternity," gave birth to a new republic, its new flag soaked in blood, the irony was noted. The French National Convention outlawed slavery in Haiti and in all the French colonies.

It would not last. The French revolution disintegrated into chaos and a dictator arose to restore order. Napoleon re-asserted the old slave laws and invaded Haiti. Yellow fever and a people who had tasted freedom prevailed over the French and the second democratic republic in the western hemisphere was born in 1804, not quite 30 years after the first. Sadly, the

first was not so glad to see the second. In the United States, slavery was still legal, and even thought necessary to preserve the economic power of the new nation. If the slaves in the United States got it in their head that they were deserving of liberty, equality and fraternity, who could say what would happen to the free enterprise system? In a conspiracy of such enormity that it should make us blush even two hundred years later, our forefathers allied themselves with their enemies to encircle Haiti with their navies and keep it out of the new emerging international system of trade. And the Haitian people, as people often do when faced with enemies from without, turned on themselves. Two hundred years of despots, military coups, and invasions ensued.

Dictators were set up and protected by western nations who helped their puppets pillage the resources of the nation. The cruelty and barbarity of the Haitian rulers were legendary. Finally, at the turn of this century, in a gestation long overdue, things were beginning to change. The government seemed to be getting a little more stable, the economy was starting to grow, even the environment, ravaged by people who had chopped down nearly every tree for firewood started to improve. Schools opened, medical clinics thrived, life began to get better. As if better even has a meaning in a land where people live on less than than \$2 a day.

And then, the earth shook. And Haiti's passion continues. What are we to do? Is this some kind of cruel joke, played by a godless universe that only delights in chaos? Is this, as Pat Robertson says, the result of a Haitian curse, and a Vodou priest's pact with the devil? Should we just forget about responding to the Haitian grief, because, as Rush Limbaugh noted, we've already paid our income tax?

The first thing we must do is remember the promises of God, the promises that we may have only been pondering in our hearts. The human yearning for freedom was placed in the human breast by God. The fact that it often gets us into trouble does not make it any less a divine gift. Haitians are no less precious in the eyes of God, than any other people. They are

not cursed; they suffer, sometimes because of bad decisions they have made, sometimes by the cruel ones others (including us) have made, and sometimes because hurricanes blow or the earth shifts. They suffer because they are part of the human family. They suffer because they are part of us. We suffer with them. God suffers with us both.

Remembering the promises of the God who has said that the poor shall be redeemed means standing with them and against any institution, principality or power that exploits, oppresses or enslaves them. Like the young priest, looking out over the sad, unfinished city of Jerusalem, we must not be silent. We must remind God through our intercession that we remember. That we are expecting divine deliverance. That we have run out of wine and only God can fill our empty stone jars with it.

At the wedding feast in Cana, Mary has waited long enough for God to fulfill the promise that Gabriel made to her thirty years before. She has just decided not to wait anymore. So she tells her son that the newly married couple has run out of wine. Jesus looks momentarily stunned. "What does that have to do with you and me?"

She gives him that look, the one that says, "You might not remember, but I do. And I expect you to keep the promise." She intercedes on behalf of a young couple whose only tragedy would be embarrassment at having to end their party early.

The tragedy a few miles off the shores of the richest nation in the history of humanity is a dying and broken land, that has always fallen short of its potential, but has always held on to its dream, a dream it got from us. It's a dream worth remembering, particularly on this weekend in January when we celebrate the life of another man with a dream, Martin Luther King.

Dr. King was not the most perfect of prophets, or perhaps his imperfections made him more perfect. He was like us: a a tangled mass of hope and despair, of faithfulness and faithlessness, of joy tinged red with sorrow. But he

remembered the promises of God. And he vowed that, for the sake of Zion, he would not keep silent. For the sake of Washington and Columbia and Birmingham and New York and San Francisco, he would not rest.

He prayed and he worked like the promises had already come true. And even though he never got to see the promise of his children judged by the content of the character rather than the color of their skin, he kept praying that God would remember that it should be so. And God remembered.

The dream of a Haiti with just rulers, a prosperous and healthy people and land green with its natural beauty is not just the dream of the Haitian people. It is our dream too. It is the dream of God.

For the sake of Haiti, we must not keep silent. For the sake of Port Au Prince, we must not rest. Until the suffering of the Haitian people is vindicated in the dream of God. We must not keep silent. We must not rest. We must dream.