

St. Timothy's, Herdon  
August 20, 2023  
Trinity 12 - Matthew 15: 21-28  
homily by roger bowen

*Disturb us Lord, when we are too well-pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore. Disturb us lord when the abundance of the things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the water of life. Stir us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery, where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars, We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes and to push us into the future in strength and courage and hope and love. We pray in the name of our Captain. Amen. 1.*

This from THE GOSPEL this morning - Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."

This from THE PEOPLE OF HAITI – Have mercy on us, St. Timothy's, our nation is being tormented in unspeakable ways! **In the cities** over 300 women and children have been kidnapped, many of them even raped in the last six months. The situation in the capital, Port-au-Prince, is beyond words. Hundreds have been killed in gang wars. That kidnapping is rampant. In large sections of the city, our people do not circulate even in their own neighborhoods unless absolutely necessary. Practically speaking, there is no federal government. There is no president and no functional justice system. Boats full of refugees are frequently intercepted at sea, or worse, found capsized, as people desperately seek a chance at life abroad. 3. The news cycle has dropped our country's sad story for the most part... and its worse than it was this time last year! Beyond appalling. A living nightmare.

This from THE GOSPEL this morning - But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."

This from *SOME AMERICANS* - I mean That Haiti, *THOSE* people just cannot get their act together. It's been YEARS for God's sake. How can we trust that our help does anything, that it even GETS there? It's hopeless.

This from THE GOSPEL this morning - He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."  
But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."

This from THE PEOPLE OF HAITI - Help us. 90% of the capitol is controlled by gangs. It's an under-reported epidemic. We're on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe down here. We are not the gangs, we are victims, we are your brothers, your sisters.

This from THE GOSPEL this morning - And after some interesting cross talk that I will leave alone for now ... and after her continued persistence,

Jesus says "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

and this from my observation **HERE** - St. Timothy's has seen the larger truth – you have been given eyes to see and minds to think and hearts to love and hands to serve - and St. Timothy's has offered those hands... especially for the innocent children. For years, for **you**, it has been about the **children**.

I'm grateful to you all and to Father Charles and Carolyn Hamm for this, our second time together. I know that I am preaching to the converted again Your precious, on- going ministry to children in Haiti continues to be an inspiration.

There is so **much** to say, but I DO remember that the mark of a good sermon is a strong beginning and a strong ending ... and keeping those two as close together as possible!

I was invited here to encourage you and thank you for the love you have shared with the children in the lakeside village of Chapoteau, in Haiti's Plateau Central ... for what has it been? 11 years now? And I know that together with St. Matthew's Church over in Sterling, you are working long distance these days, working through your partner-Haitian Episcopal priest, Pere Kesner Gracia. As I mentioned last year, I have met with him. He lives in a hospital and schools complex in a place called Cange ... made famous by Dr. Paul Farmer's work. Dr. Farmer and Pere Fritz Lafontant built the original, now-famous hospital there ... and your school, Lekol St. Matthiu, is one of his several, distant missions/schools. As some of your congregation knows well, this one requires a hike to reach; and a sketchy boat trip too.

You see, a "parish" in Haiti is like a solar system – it includes a main church where the priest usually resides, and then it also can include as many as a dozen satellite missions and preaching stations some distance away, like yours. They are all **that** priest's responsibility; That's a lot to cover, and so, lay leadership is critical.

Here's a little story: This one reminds me of how we are taught about the essence of faith and service, not by what **we** do necessarily, but what we absorb as we watch our Haitian brothers and sisters from afar... or up close. This one's up close

it's important .... Because what we learn about our Haitian friends' faith touches our hearts, it changes us ... in fact knowing our friends in Haiti is more like a soul-scrubbing. And we need that sometimes. Maybe all the time?

So, this moment I remember vividly: One day, a while back, before Covid changed our world, and the violence in and around the capitol stalled ... well, STOPPED ... our visits to Haiti, I was sitting under a mango tree - in the shade of a huge mango tree - in the little, rural village of Cerca la Source. It's really a lot like your partners' village of Chapoteau. I was a bit nervous because it was still difficult for me to speak Kreyol. And I was trying to talk in Kreyol with a founding member in that little church and school. His name is Bosi. He is my friend. He is a little man - maybe not even five feet tall ... and his back is not straight. He has a hunchback. Sometimes little kids laugh at him because he looks different from everyone else. But, despite that, he is a very faithful man. He's proud to be an Episcopalian. In fact, I think Bosi is very aware of following Jesus and the urgings of the Holy Spirit, most of the time. No, more than **aware**; he breathes it in, and he is led. He works every day for the Episcopal school and church, Lekol St. Marc's in Cerca la Source. He visits the sick. He helps the school plan for the future, and, despite their teasing him about his appearance sometimes, he engages and he loves the **children** in the school. 250 students admire him, respect him, really do love him too. So, he faithfully serves the people of that small mission. And he always carries his Bible or Prayer Book in his hand. When the priest is not there: [Pere Couloute now], when he can't be in the village of Cerca la Source, Bosi is the leader. He carries the ball. And he tries to follow Jesus. He's told me that. I sometimes think that when Bosi acts, Jesus is actually acting through him. Or next to him. Leading him.

And so, one hot day, as the two of us sat in the cooler shade of that mango tree, I asked Bosi a question: "How old are you Bosi?" Konbyen ane ou geyen, Bosi?

He smiled and he told me his age... and I was surprised. I was surprised because I thought Bosi was older than I was. But he was **not** older than me. He told me his age and it turned out that I was older than Bosi! I was **five years** older than Bosi. So, I said to Bosi, – in my funny Kreyol "Bosi, I have more years than you " Bosi, mwen geyen pi anpil ane pase ou." I have more years than you do, Bosi ... MEANING in a teasing, show-offy kind of way, that I had more life experience, I knew a little more about life, maybe. Trying to be funny. Such a hilarious American I was! [a legend in my own mind] I have more years than you do, Bosi!

Bosi just sat there and looked at me, smiling, for a while ...and then he quietly said... "Yes, mon pe, but I have more **suffering** than you." I have more suffering than you. And then he went silent. And we just sat there and looked at each other for a long time. There were no words. Then, he rose, with some difficulty, and shambled off.

Later that day, I saw Bosi limping up a dusty trail ... walking in the unusual, hitchy manner he had to walk. He was on his way to visit a sick child, a student from their school there....a member of the church, of course. The child was confined to his family's mud daub home. Bosi had his Prayer Book in his hand .... and just ahead of him there on the path, I think I saw ... I THINK I saw **Jesus**. I did. And, He was saying: "This way, Bosi. This way."

And, off they went.

Bosi is one of our brothers. Knowing him, watching him is soul-scrubbing. There are "Bosi's" like him in your village of Chapateau too.

I know your visits- 3 years back now - showed you that the majority of Pere Gracia's people lack the basic things we take for granted as essential to maintaining a good standard of living. In a country where nearly half of the people are still unable to read, literacy is a step toward self-determination. So, schools. **Children** ... are THAT diocese's focus. Every Episcopal church is also a school.

You probably also know that Haiti may be the largest diocese in the Episcopal Church – in fact in terms of numbers it is **the** largest. 80,000 communicants ... Virginia's close. Materially-impooverished but spiritually rich and vibrant, they are members of Province IV.

So, sixty Haitian Episcopal priests, like Pere Gracia, men and women, and countless lay folk, work tirelessly in the festering towns and dirt-poor countryside. They establish and maintain **200** churches and 220 schools. They travel by jeep, motorcycle, or horse or on foot. They sometimes negotiate treacherous mountain trails and ford rivers – he crosses a lake in your case - to reach the thatched or concrete block or tin buildings that serve as churches, schools and clinics for their Haitian communities.

About half of those schools have American partners, like you, but these numbers are declining. We have lost American partners because of the pandemic years of course and, now, the **inability** to visit.... because ... well, you know why. Getting out of Port au Prince and to Chapateau would be life-threatening. Way too risky. So, we can't see each other, face to face.

Thank God, it's quieter and safer out IN the countryside, like at Chapoteau, away from Port au Prince. [I'm sending you something this afternoon that'll give you a look at that life when it is peaceful] And, there **you** are, helping to provide a safe oasis for that village's kids, where life can go on. Our friends there certainly struggle along doing the best that they can... but the ramifications of the chaos in the cities - and on the roads leading there are felt throughout the whole country. Food scarcity is now an even larger issue.

So, this story is not simple.

But what I can say to you with absolute and unqualified conviction is this:

Your support for the kids at Lekol St. Mathiue these past years has made a real impact for real families. Otherwise, parents couldn't afford even the small school fees. And, your help occurs in the midst of that broader context that is tragic, dysfunctional, and unjust. It's a context where progress is precious and bad news is ubiquitous. To keep your commitment ... to keep that little school open another year, I understand your hoped-for goal is to raise \$21,000. You can do that. You can.

Place a candle in the middle of a well-lit room. But then place that same candle in the middle of a pitch dark room, and the light shows very differently. Yes. That's what you are doing. What part are YOU, each of you, playing in that? 4.

We ache to get back there, to see Christ in our brothers and sisters eyes., and they in ours. We are one. Those of you who have traveled there, you know. But we can't go back yet.

And, when we don't go to visit, face to face, and see Christ in each other's eyes, we are missing so much, but we must not forget – we miss seeing Bosi and his friend, Jesus. We miss the little boy in kindergarten who offers us his chair, the baby in the pink dress that someone in New York sent to Haiti, the man in the woman's hat with the black rose on it who cries when he prays, the beautiful singing that bubbles up during the prayers of the people from the soul of the congregation, the hero priests who hike miles - sometimes through the heat and mud and dust - to their congregations without even losing the crease in their pants, the first grade student who carefully wraps a portion of her school lunch rice and beans in a banana leaf to take home to a brother who cannot attend school and who has no lunch.

Our prayer is that one day we will be able to return and be together with our extended Episcopal family. For now, we do what we can. We have been inspired by our Haitian brothers and sisters ... we can't forget them now... we can't abandon them.

We learn from our Haitian brothers and sisters ... we learn so much. ... they do Kingdom work.

We **also** learn from the broken people who are hurting the most down there right now. Perhaps they are the ones closer to the cities. Scripture is most extraordinary because it repeatedly and invariably graces the people on the bottom, and not the people on the top. Examples? ... like the rejected son, the barren woman, the sinner, the leper, the outsider, the little boy with no legs who scoots around his Haitian village on a piece of cardboard.... **those** are often the ones chosen by God. Somehow.

Our Haitian brothers and sisters draw people to Christ by showing us a light that is so lovely that we want with all of our hearts to know the source of it.

As Bishop Desmond Tutu once told us: "We are only the light bulbs, and our job is just to remain screwed in." I think he could have been talking about *them*. They somehow remain "screwed in." Pray God that he means **us** too.

And so, as we prepare to share the bread and wine, let's be still again for a moment, and remember Bosi's last sighting... on his way to visit a sick child....and then we'll pray for children ... our children here, and our children there.

SILENCE

we pray for children...  
who put chocolate fingers everywhere  
who like to be tickled  
who stomp in puddles and ruin new pants  
who sneak popsicles before supper  
who erase holes in math workbooks  
who can never find their shoes.

And we pray for children  
who stare at photographers from tent city pathways  
who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers  
who never "counted potatoes"  
who are born in places we wouldn't be caught dead in  
who never go to the circus  
who live in an X-rated world.

We pray for children who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions  
who sleep with the dog and bury goldfish  
who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money  
who cover themselves with band aids and sing off key  
who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink who slurp their soup

And we pray for those children  
who never get dessert  
who have no safe blanket to drag behind them  
who watch their parents watch them die  
who can't find any bread... to steal  
who don't have any rooms to clean up  
whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser  
whose monsters are real.

We pray for children who spend all their allowance before Tuesday  
who throw temper tantrums in the grocery store and who pick at their food  
who like ghost stories  
who shove dirty cloths under the bed and never rinse out the tub  
who get visits from the tooth fairy  
who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool  
who squirm in church and scream on the phone  
whose tears we sometimes laugh at and whose smiles can make us cry.

And we pray for children  
whose nightmares come in the daytime  
who will eat...anything  
who have never seen a dentist  
who aren't spoiled by anybody  
who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep  
who live and move but have no being.

We pray for children who want to be carried and those who must  
for those we never give up on and those who never get a second chance  
for those we smother...and for those who will grab the hand  
of anybody kind enough to offer it. We pray for children. AMEN