

Season of Creation Week 2 Year A: 16 /17 September 2017

St. James Episcopal Church, Clinton NY

Karen Anderson, Lay Preacher

**As Christians, it is our faith that gives us hope...
with God's help, we can make a difference.**

Genesis 3:14-19,

Psalm 139:7-12

Romans 5:12-17

Matthew 12:38-40

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

I would like for you to recap in your mind, your morning so far. I am sure it is similar to mine - you awoke in your comfortable bed, inside your spacious bedroom, one of many rooms inside your lovely home, which resides in a quaint village or town, surrounded by grass and trees that are starting to show the majestic colors of fall in Central New York. Upon rising you walked to your bathroom and used your flush toilet, took a shower with hot running water and selected the clothing you are wearing from a vast array of choices. Your coffee was brewed in your automatic system that you plugged into the constant electrical current that runs throughout your house day and night. You selected your breakfast from your abundantly stocked cupboards and refrigerator. Depending on how much time you allotted, you may have watched any of 100s of television channels, checked you email, or social media sites. When the time came to depart for Church, you pushed the auto-door opener of your garage and got into your modern vehicle and drove the 5 to maybe 35 minutes between your house and St. James'. And here you are sitting in this little yellow church on Williams Street with its beautiful stained glass windows, organ, and brass pulpit sharing morning worship with family, friends, and even some you don't yet know well.

Two weeks ago, five members of our St. James' community had a radically different experience on Sunday morning. We awoke to roosters crowing, crawled out from under our mosquito netting, stepped into our shoes and headed to the bathroom with flashlight in hand because the electricity had been cut off shortly after sun rise to conserve the solar power being stored in the battery. We turned the knob that allowed water to fill the tank of the toilet, so that we could flush it. We then took a cold shower. (Both of these actions were luxuries not afforded most of our neighbors). We ate a delicious breakfast

consisting of pumpkin soup and fresh fruit, then we walked a few yards to St. Matthias church in Cherident, Haiti. (A location that does not show up on most maps). To say that the church is open air, is not an exaggeration. We sat near the back to take advantage of the breeze and as the only “blans” (whites) in the crowd of over 200 well dressed parishioners we were not exactly inconspicuous. The service was said and sung in French and Creole, but as we watched 2 young children being baptized, we were actually able to recognize many parts of the liturgy. While we did not always understand the words, Pere Fred was correct, the Holy Spirit was working among us. Following a 2.5 hour service, we had a chance to meet the Vestry of St. Matthias and share our mutual respect and gratitude for each other.

Like many places I have been to, Haiti is a land of diversity. When I arrived in Port-au-Prince my senses were assaulted. It is hot and humid, there are over one million people - most of whom it appears are gathered outdoors, and the amount of garbage that can be seen is overwhelming. However, as we drove out of the city we experienced the sheer beauty of the mountains and valleys. The contrast is stark.

The Haitian people have a saying “Dye mon, gen mon” - which translates roughly into beyond the mountains, more mountains. It is said in many situations including as encouragement that we can conquer the next problem that comes along, but it is also an accurate depiction of their topography. Upon leaving Port-au-Prince, we climbed up the ridge of one mountain, only to drive down the other side and ascend the next one over and over until we reached our destination. Throughout our travels we stopped many times to capture the vistas with our cameras, but I am not sure any photo could ever do justice to the glory of God’s creation we were exposed to.

We are currently in our second week of celebrating creation season at St. James’. The goal of this season is to make us aware of our responsibility to care for the world we have been gifted with. Today’s theme is the earth. According to Genesis, we no longer live in the beautiful gardens of Eden due to human sin. Not only were woman and man punished for eating of the tree of knowledge, but the earth itself was cursed! Even in the Bible, the earth bears the cost of human actions.

Regardless of where each of us are on the spectrum of global warming science; whether we deny its existence or we whole heartedly respect the evidence, I think we can agree that humankind’s impact on the earth is obvious. For me, in Haiti, it was the first thing I saw and the issue that I believe will be the key to improving the quality of life for the Haitian people. For most of us, it would be unthinkable to throw away a plastic bottle - it either gets turned in for its 5 cent deposit, or it gets recycled. In Haiti, the streets and canals are swimming in plastic bottles. Over time, much of that plastic ends up in the ocean

where it acts to curse the earth. Even here in the US, we have not always been environmentally aware. Many people buried or burned plastic on a regular basis until we listened to science and figured out a better way of dealing with plastic and garbage in general. Today, plastic bottles are turned into fleece and other useful products. We educate people daily on the virtues of recycling and our local governments demand that we stop filling landfills. The key to this stewardship has been education.

Education has also contributed to the harnessing of solar radiation to create electricity. The science behind solar power is relatively modern. Our proficiency of conservation has expanded greatly in the past few decades. Scientific breakthroughs have provided us with countless opportunities to improve the quality and quantity of our lives.

As Bishop DeDe pointed out from this very pulpit Monday night, we have always been a parish that believes in the power of education. How might God be calling us to share that power with our friends in Haiti?

Our brother Pere Fred is the greatest advocate of education for his parishioners. He knows what opportunities it created for him and he works tirelessly to provide options for children and adults to improve their lives through education. His efforts have led to our partnership with St. Paul's school. Our relationship with him has afforded the students and teachers a new building to hold classes in, some lunches, and some salaries, but the needs of these 150 students and their 10 teachers are great.

It might be tempting to feel overwhelmed and give up, but as Christians, it is our faith that gives us hope. True, the depth of poverty is great, but God's love is far greater. Yes, there is tremendous suffering in this world, but with God's help, we can make a difference.

When we - this community of St. James' travelled to Haiti, and we listened, worshiped and broke bread with our sisters and brothers in Christ, we were experiencing the face of God. When we delivered 250 pounds of school supplies and attempted to speak even "piti piti" (a little bit of) Creole, our friends experienced the face of God.

With all my heart I feel God is calling this community surrounding Clinton to help the community of Beaudin Jean Pierre. My question to you, is will you join us in answering that call?

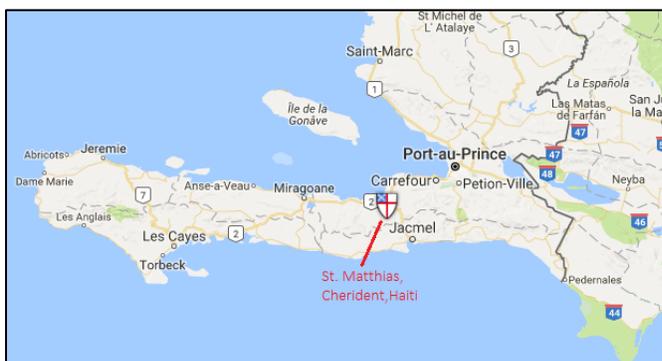
When we renew our Baptismal Covenant, we vow to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

As you discern what God is asking of you, I would like to extend an invitation: On September 30th, we are hosting a pot-luck dinner here at St. James. After you see our photos and hear our stories of this trip to Haiti, I hope you will be moved to join us in this mission of partnership with St. Paul's. I pray we will allow the power of God's presence to pour out of our little yellow church into the world surrounding us, and we will experience the love of God holding us up in our endeavors.

AMEN



The group from St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton, with Pere Fred in front of St. Paul's school



Map from www.episcopalchurch.org/parish/st-matthias-cherident-hait and google maps