

**2 Epiphany – Year C – January 17, 2010**  
**Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36: 5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11**  
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In the popular quiz show *Jeopardy*, the answers are provided, and the contestants are challenged to offer their response in the form of a question. It is a clever reversal of the usual question and answer format that is most instinctive for each of us. We have plenty of questions this week in the wake of the tragic events of the massive earthquake that has devastated Haiti and left tens of thousands of people dead or injured, and many more without clean water, food or medicine. This natural disaster will almost certainly result in even more deaths as people try to do the best they can to stay alive, risking disease from drinking polluted water or spoiled food, and from infections made worse by inadequate access to medical care. *Jeopardy* is an appropriate word for today. It means danger, risk, peril and trouble. For a country as poor as Haiti, when even the meager resources they had to start with have been snatched from them, we may well wonder why God did not intervene, or be angry on behalf of a people who seem to have been kicked in the teeth by God. The burning question of the hour is, “Why does a good God allow this kind of suffering in the world?” We will begin our conversation *Jeopardy*-style today, by posing an answer and exploring the possible questions: “This Word risks everything to make sense of the joy and celebration of life, as well as great suffering.”

Perhaps it’s something of a challenge for us to see anything tragic in the joyous celebration of the wedding at Cana in Galilee. It’s helpful for us to remember that John’s gospel is filled with multiple possibilities for interpretation, especially when it comes to the material facts versus the spiritual or symbolic pointers. The truths about God are seldom directly accessible, but are mostly communicated to us by indirect means through signs and parables. God is always seeking us out, and John’s gospel is redolent with potential for you and me to actively search for and discover God in both the obvious ways and by some of the more hidden paths.

While the events at the wedding in Cana are documented as Jesus’ first sign of His public ministry, we learn immediately that the wedding takes place on the third day. John may already be pointing to the link between the beginning and the end with an allusion to Jesus’ resurrection on the third day. Jesus is present at the wedding with some of His disciples. The mother of Jesus is also there – never named in any other way in John’s Gospel -- but present at this event, and present at the cross of Christ. In both instances, Jesus speaks to His mother as “woman”. In both instances, the term is unusual, although not as harsh or hostile in the original language as it sounds in English. However, it does distance Jesus from his mother’s influence or authority. At the cross, Jesus’ mother is the woman who is given to Jesus’ beloved disciple to become a part of his family, and also to the family of disciples or followers of Christ that will become the church or the Body of Christ in the world. Once the thread of Jesus’ glory is revealed in God’s pattern of salvation – the glory as of God’s only and beloved Son – we already know that the end will be tragic and agonizing, at the hands of the leaders of a corrupt and fearful system.

The second thread of woe is evident in the failures of the religious system itself, as symbolized for us in the six empty jars and the reference to the rites of purification. In Biblical symbolism, six is an imperfect number, and the six jars signify the flaw of legalism and power mongering that has infected the teachings of the Law through the Judean leaders. They have left the people empty and thirsty, and they have emptied the Law of its divine purpose. The third thread is the potentially tragic consequences of the failure of the wedding party to provide adequate hospitality to their guests. Most surprising to us, in the ancient near East, a standard of hospitality was a legal requirement and any failure to provide it was open to litigation and serious harm to the bridegroom and his family. Let’s be clear now about the disaster lurking beneath this innocent and joyful celebratory event. John is in effect, expressing the breadth and depth of the dreadful contagion that

permeates the whole of God's creation. The Word becomes flesh and steps into His own creation, to be scorned and ridiculed, instead of praised and welcomed. On the cross, Jesus will bear the terrible consequences of humanity's inglorious status as fallen creatures, who love darkness more than light. The chosen people of God, who are supposed to be the bearers of the Light of God, have become like dimly burning wicks. Their leaders blur the lines of sight to God with soot, smoke and mirrors, instead of being clear beacons guiding all to God in Christ the Messiah. Finally, even at an individual level, the gracious hospitality of the bridegroom and his family has failed, and they are open to injurious prosecution and judgment.

In current events, we rightly desire to help the people of Haiti. The magnitude of their loss is truly horrific. But there is still a nagging question in the back of my mind, one that is making me irritable and fidgety with God. Across the world, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children die daily from preventable diseases, from drinking contaminated water, from malnutrition, and all the consequences of poverty. At the other end of the spectrum, thousands die every day from obesity and heart disease, from the effects of smoking and drug abuse, or in car accidents. All consequences of a culture of affluence. Should we also be seeking our own response to Jesus' command to love God and love our neighbor every day? Where is our outpouring of compassion and outrage at the injustices that happen daily in our world? We already know where God is in all this. God is weeping. God is standing right beside all those who are suffering. God is constantly working to redeem the tragedy and pain, to heal and reconcile the whole world to God's self. The real question we must ask is, "Where am I in all of this?" How does my comfortable life and faith stand silent in the face of global suffering? Is it possible that the tragedy of Haiti is not just the natural disaster that has devastated this poverty-stricken nation? Is it likely that even before the earthquake hit, the tragedy of Haiti was always there for those with eyes to see and ears to hear? It is right to be generous in giving as much as we can to relieve the suffering of the people of Haiti. Yet perhaps God in Christ is prodding us to pray about extending that generosity, questioning why the people of Haiti have always been so poor in comparison with our relative affluence. From the joyful festivities of a wedding in Cana of Galilee, maybe Christ is prompting us to extend the length, breadth and depth of our acts of solidarity with **all** the poor and hungry in the world, who continue their struggle to free themselves from all forms of injustice.

"This Word risks everything to make sense of the joy and celebration of life, as well as great suffering." What answer will we give? Just as the tragedy of human failings is present even in the joys of human life, God's gracious response is also evident. The mother of Jesus asks Him to help the newlyweds out of a potentially harmful situation. Jesus' initial response seems to be reluctance, but his acts speak louder than His words. The quality and sheer abundance of God's grace fills the empty vessels to the brim: as Jesus still does for you and me today. When human effort fails, the mother of Jesus looks to Him with expectancy and persistence. Her faith and Jesus' obedience to God's will that this hour become the first of seven signs that reveal His glory produces extraordinary results. It is not just Jesus' identity as Messiah that is revealed, but why who He is matters to all humanity. Jesus is our savior and redeemer, at every possible level of our being. Nothing diminishes the terrible pain of the people of Haiti and all who suffer in this life. However, in Christ's suffering for the sake of the world, we have some perspective on our earthly afflictions; we have the hope of healing; and the promise of eternal life. The Psalmist puts it like this, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult" (Psalm 46:1-3). Jesus was, is, and always will be the answer to what ails this world.

Amen.