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Nehemiah 8:2-10
1 Corinthians 12:12-27
Luke 4:14-21
Epiphany 3c
January 23/24, 2010

On the morning of December 8, the flight I was on landed in Port au Prince. After passing through customs, our luggage was put on a bus and taken to the Hotel Montana. I and the other 23 participants in the Food for the Poor Pilgrimage boarded another bus and began our visits to ministries sponsored or supported by Food for the Poor. Our first stop was a “fish farm”. The intricate science of harvesting and reproducing fish and the concept of “fish farming” was something I could barely understand. Next we traveled to “The Little Children of Jesus Home”. Here, orphaned children with varying degrees of developmental disabilities lived and were cared for. I had the pleasure of feeding a young boy, Jean. Because of the language difference, and the severity of Jean’s illness, we could not communicate. My prayer that I recited to myself as I fed him, wiped his face, and helped him drink, was that through my small ministry to Jean, Jesus might touch my soul. It became so clear to me as I was feeding him that I needed Jean much more than Jean needed me.

From the orphanage we traveled to the grounds of Notre Dame. On these grounds were homes for the elderly and a school and orphanage for young boys. We attended the Mass that was held for the elderly and visited the school and orphanage. At the orphanage we were entertained by the singing of the boys. We then distributed to them various small gifts: Notebooks, pencils and pens, crayons, candies and wrist bands. On the wrist bands were the words so identified with the Christmas Feast that was coming soon: Peace, Joy, Hope, Jesus. After the gifts were distributed two of the boys came up to me and pointed to the wrist bands that I was wearing. I had been wearing these wrist bands for a few years. On the green band that I wore, was written, “Save Darfur”. I wore this band to remind myself of the suffering of the people of the Sudan. It was a reminder to me to keep the people of Sudan in my prayers. The other was a white band on which was written the word: “One“. This I wore to remind myself of the “One Campaign”. This is an organization involved with advocacy for justice, for adequate health care, for education, and for an end to the poverty that afflicts millions of persons around the world.

I could not possibly refuse to give the boys the wrist bands that I was wearing. In the weeks after I returned from Haiti, even before the earthquake there were many moments when I noticed that the bands were not on my wrists. When I did so, I thought of the boys to whom I had given them.

I wonder where those wrist bands are today. Perhaps they have been tossed aside; maybe now in the bottom drawer of a dresser. Maybe they are buried in the rubble someplace in Port au Prince. Are the boys perhaps still wearing them? Do the wrist bands remind the boys that I promised to keep them in my prayers? Do they remind the boys to pray for me?

One. I have thought of that wrist band often as I read the reading from Corinthians this week. The word “one” appears in the reading repeatedly. One body, one spirit, one another. Paul is repeating his deeply held conviction that in the one spirit of God, we, though many are one body. In the one spirit of God, we though many are members of one another. In the one spirit of God, we though many are the body of Christ, doing the work of Christ.

This truth gives me much hope as I continue to see the heart breaking images of the continued suffering of the people of Haiti. The one body of Christ is suffering in Haiti. The one body of Christ is dying, is homeless and is thirsting in Haiti. The one body of Christ is at work in Haiti. The one body of Christ is at also work in the ministry of those who are tending to the injured, consoling the bereaved, feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty. The body is at work in those who are building shelters and hospitals and schools. They of course are the people who are engaged in the hands on relief and assistance ministry. But, the truth that Paul is emphasizing is that we are part of the body as well. Others do what they can do there. Here we do what we can. The body of Christ, the spirit of Christ empowers us to do what we can. And what can we do?

First of all, dear friends we pray. Those who are suffering, those searching for food, or water, shelter or medicine may not have the time or the energy to pray. Those involved in ministry in Haiti are working around the clock. They may not have the time to sit and pray. There are few churches still standing in Haiti. It is hard for them to pray. Time and energy for prayer is a luxury that we have. Pray.

We give. The money we give, the pennies, the nickels, the dollars all do add up. All our financial assistance is part of the body of Christ which supports ministries of those who are there in Haiti. We can also be mindful of our abundance. We can remember with every glass of water we drink the millions of people in Haiti and around the world who lack clean water for drinking. We can be responsible stewards of all that we have. We can raise our voice. One of the true gifts that we have is the ability to be advocates for justice. We, here in this country, can raise our voices to change unjust systems that exist in Haiti and around the world. We can be a voice for those who have no voice. We can also give our time to support ministries here. As so much attention is given to the suffering in Haiti, the ministry needs continue in our community. At this time, we are invited to be the body of Christ here as we offer our time in local ministries. I cannot go to Haiti, but there are ministries I can be involved with here.

In a few weeks St. Andrews will be hosting families who are without housing---in the power of the one spirit, the work we do on behalf of the families who are with us, support the ministries of those engaged in Haiti. Here in Grand Rapids I can donate blood. Here in Grand Rapids, I can work in a food ministry. Here in Grand Rapids I can visit the sick. It is the one spirit giving power to the body of Christ at work in Haiti and in Grand Rapids.

We can also remember that just as the people of Haiti need our support at this time of their need. So we also need them. In the face of such calamities, they bless us with their faith filled perseverance and hope. We are one body, equally needing each other. Indeed, it may be that we need the people of Haiti as much as they need us.

In the Gospel this morning, Jesus proclaims himself to have been anointed by the Holy Spirit. At your baptism, you also were anointed by that same spirit. Like Jesus, you have been sent to proclaim good news to the poor, release to those held captive by poverty and despair, and freedom to all who are oppressed by the tragedies of our time. The spirit that was alive and at work in Jesus is now at work in the body of those who believe in Jesus. You carry on his work in our day. Today his work is being fulfilled in Grand Rapids, in Port au Prince, in Sudan. His one body is at work in our one world.

This past week I ordered another bracelet. On it will be written the word "ONE". When it comes I will wear it. When I wear it I will remember the people of Sudan and the people of Haiti. I will remember Jean whom I fed at the orphanage. I will remember the boys of the school and orphanage of Notre Dame. I will remember one to whom I gave my wrist band. The one for whom I promised to pray. When I wear it I will remember the one Spirit of God who is at work in the one body of Christ. The one body of Christ that is carrying on the ministry of Jesus. One spirit, one body, one ministry that is at work through us who are members of one another.

Now, dear friends, I ask you to pray.

This prayer was written by another part of the Body of Christ. The Sojourners community in Washington DC:

Break our hearts, Lord, break our hearts. For the lives lost in Haiti, each one loved by you, break our hearts. For those who have lost family members -- sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, mothers, fathers -- break our hearts. For those who have lost homes and belongings, who sleep on the streets, break our hearts. For the crippling poverty that afflicts millions of Haitians, break our hearts. For our complicity in the sinful structures and systems that lead to oppression and injustice, break our hearts. For the state of your creation -- groaning for redemption and restoration -- break our hearts. And then put us back together, and make us one so that with peace, humility, and your perspective, we might work toward seeing your kingdom on earth. Amen.