

17 January 2010  
Epiphany 2  
Sanctity of Life Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Looking to the Cross”

Text: John 2:1-11; Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

It has been difficult to watch the pictures coming in from Haiti these past few days. The tremendous destruction and loss of life; the hardship and difficulties that the people there are going through, and that they will endure for days and weeks and months to come.

With that on our minds, today's Gospel seems a bit out of place - *Jesus at a wedding*. To consider such a joyous event in the face of such a tragedy seems a little like Nero fiddling while Rome burned. But it would have been so even if the earthquake in Haiti had never happened. For there would still have been tragedy and pain and suffering all around us, just perhaps not on so great a scale or so well publicized. For there would still be:

the tragedy of abortion, and of babies unloved and uncared for after they are born. The tragedy of people dying at the hands of terrorists, or at the hands of governments vying for power.

The tragedy of workplace murders and domestic violence.

The tragedy of homelessness and starvation in the most prosperous nation on earth.

The tragedy of euthanasia, or what some folks like to call “mercy killing.”

The tragedies that happen in the lives of people everyday, like cancer, Alzheimer's, or other debilitating diseases.

The tragedy of sin is never in short supply.

And then today is also Sanctity of Life Sunday - another interesting juxtaposition this day. The day that we especially remember - even in the face and in the midst of all this sin and tragedy and death - that every human life is worth the life of God's Son. *Every human life*, no matter who they are - the unborn, the weak, the underprivileged, the overprivileged, the handicapped, the suffering, the struggling, the unwanted, the elderly, the sick, the poor - those nobody else may care about, our Lord does. Every human life important to Him. Every person loved by Him. Every human life a life for which He joyously and willingly traded His own. That is a marvelous, wondrous truth which we do well to consider.

There is a danger in that, however - the danger for us Christians to fiddle while our neighbor suffers, thinking that since God loves them He will take care of them. *That's true*, but He calls on us to take care of them as well. To show compassion and love as we can, with the gifts the Lord has given you.

+ You may not be able to go to Haiti and help dig through the rubble, or treat the injured, or feed the hungry, but perhaps you can help financially.

+ *And*, you have opportunities to help your neighbor here, facing perhaps smaller, but no less serious, tragedies. Showing love and compassion and care to those in need here.

+ *And*, you can pray. Do not underestimate the importance of your prayers! As baptized children of your Heavenly Father, you have the access and high honor of lifting up others before the throne of the Almighty. Whether *many* are praying for them, or *no one* is praying for them, *you* can pray for them. And what you are unable to do, your Saviour is able to do. James tells us that the prayers of the righteous, of God's children, have great power (James 5:16).

That's what Mary did at the wedding of Cana. *Such a small need* - they ran out of wine! Insignificant, compared with the needs we see today. But she saw a need, and she went to the One who could help. And our Lord heard, and saw, and helped. Will He not also hear and see and help now? Indeed, He will. For that is why He is at Cana at all. Jesus is God in the flesh, come to deal with the tragedy of sin.

So why, then, many want to know - we want to know - why does God allow these tragedies to happen? Why does He not stop them? Or - dare we say - why does He *cause* them to happen? It's not a new question. It was asked after 9-11, after the tsunami, after Katrina. It's asked often in hospitals and nursing homes, gravesides and memorials. It's asked especially when we see suffering of such great magnitude. It's a question that in itself, is an *accusation* - that God has done wrong. That His actions need to be justified and explained. With such a question, the Creator is put on trial by His creatures. And we demand answers. Imagine that! We demand answers from God!

*God doesn't have to answer us! . . .* **But He did.** Not by telling us all the answers to all the questions we have - we probably wouldn't be satisfied with the answers anyway! No, He answered that night in Bethlehem, by becoming one with us in our suffering. By not remaining aloof and separate from us in the tragedy of our sin, but by becoming one with us in it.

But, honestly, we don't like that answer, do we? We don't think God should come to us *in* our suffering, but that He should take us *out* of our suffering! He should somehow rapture us out of this pain and tragedy, right? . . . But God deals with it in His way, not our way. And so today, not one person in Haiti, or one person here,

is feeling a pain, a heartache, a sorrow, a shame, or a grief, that He did not feel. That caused Him to cry out from the cross, *My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?* (Matt 27:46) And remember, there was an earthquake that day, too.

That was ***His hour***. On the cross. The reason He came. To take this world and universe that Adam wrenched out of whack in sin, and set it right again. Right not with us, but with his Father. Not by abolishing sin, but by atoning for it; forgiving it. For if He were to simply abolish sin, then what of us? What of us born in sin, with sin? Then we too are abolished. But that is surely not why He came. And so He comes and joins us, He suffers and dies, that we be forgiven, redeemed, reconciled, saved.

That day was Jesus' wedding day - a day of both bloodshed and joy. For that day, after leaving His Father and then His mother, Jesus joyously clung fast to His Bride, to you. Clinging to you on the cross. Clinging to you and your sin, your suffering, your brokenness, your shame - making it all His, becoming one flesh with you and all you are, to make you His. That after the suffering, after the pain and death, after the tragedy of sin is dealt with, ***on the third day*** there be joy. The best for last. A resurrection to a new, eternal, life.

Yes, it is quite the opposite of the ways of the world, isn't it? At Cana, too. The master of the feast wondered at this, for everyone else does it differently. It is usually the best now, first. We want it that way, and want God to do it that way. Escape the suffering of this world, the sin and horror, now. We would rather go now, leave now, die now, before what I see in Haiti is me. Before my tragedy gets any worse.

But that is not our Lord's way. Instead, He says, *I am with you. Always.* (Matt 28:20) He does not take us out of the trials and troubles of this world and life, but comes into them with us, for us. And today, He comes to you, for you, in His body and blood, in His Supper, with His promise of life. That the sin of the world and the tragedies of life not overcome you, for His forgiveness, life, and yes, *victory* are yours. Your as you eat His body and drink His blood. Suffering is not a sign that God is not with you, any more than success is a sign that He is. No! As we live in this world, we live not by sight but by faith. Faith is His promise. That He sees, He knows, He cares, and that He is here, working and saving.

*Now, does it look that way in Haiti right now?* You see, that's the wrong question to ask. Ask the disciples if they saw that on the cross. They didn't, and we don't. But what we see is not all there is. And the cross shows us that God is with us in our suffering and working in our suffering, in ways that we do not know and cannot see. But faith believes that He is. For so He has promised. Faith believes that He is here, just as He is in Haiti, in war torn countries, in hospitals, abortion clinics,

nursing homes, and in your home.

And so now, we live by faith, and, let me suggest, in two ways. **First**, like Mary, we offer up our prayers and petitions for those in need. Lord, they have no food, they have no water in Haiti. Lord, my neighbor is in trouble. And we help as we are able - prayer is not an excuse to inaction, but a recognition of our limitedness, that only He whose love is perfect and whose ways are good can truly help. But perhaps He will use us in some small way to do so.

And **second**, we repent. Because repentance takes us outside of ourselves, outside our self-pity. In repentance, we cling not to our sin and suffering, or to our wisdom and understanding, or to our answers and what we think is reasonable - *repentance looks and clings to the cross*. To let God be God, and our Saviour be our Saviour. In His way, not in ours. And in the cross we see the sanctity of our life, and the life of every person, and we see the love of our Saviour. And then receiving His forgiveness and love, we live and give the same to others. Joining them in their suffering. And looking forward to the day when we drink the new wine of the kingdom of heaven, in the wedding feast that has no end.

That day at Cana, we are told, ***Jesus manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him***. And today, as our Lord manifests His glory by changing bread and wine into His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins, for our life and salvation, may the same be said of us: that in all that we do, in all that we say, in all that we live - *they believe in Him*.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.