

Last Epiphany ~ February 14, 2010 ~ A homily preached by The Rev'd Erl G. Purnell at Old St. Andrew's Church, Bloomfield, CT

Exodus 34.29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3.12-4.2; Luke 9.28-43

For me, Valentine's Day means buying a new vacuum cleaner for my wife. The candy and flower thing is such a cliché. I tend to the practical. I would never venture to get a handbag or shoes, so I try to imagine what's most important and needed. New tires occasionally come to mind; having the windows washed would be a winner, except Valentine's always seems to come in the winter; taking a Caribbean vacation, now that's something I could get into if Joanne wasn't still on the west coast with our daughter.

Unfortunately, Joanne bought a new Dyson on sale last August. It was such a good deal, she couldn't resist. The two old vacuums now share basement duty. So, I'm both without my wife on Valentine's and absent the opportunity to surprise her with a brand new vacuum. Maybe I'll get a new refrigerator tomorrow.

Another thing going on these days is the realization that I've just passed my 16th year as a priest in the church. Now, I've lived a pretty eclectic life, as many of you know, and I tend to change careers instead of jobs—Navy pilot, school teacher, farmer & woodsman, computer systems designer, development officer. See what I mean? And, although some overlapped, usually these careers lasted 5 or 6 years each. Anyway, it's taken me 16 years to get the hang of this career and I find I'm still captivated by it every day.

One of the reasons is you. You keep changing. Your needs change, things happen to you, you want to get married or have your munchkin baptized, you get sick. You also challenge me. When I think I've got this gig figured out, you push back, you want something new, you imagine the next change and ask, "Why don't we do thus 'an such?" I guess I should say thanks because you keep me on my toes and engaged in the life of the parish. So, thanks!

Of course, I can't help but comment this morning on the first verse of Psalm 99:

*The Lord is King;
let the people tremble;**
*[The Lord] is enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth shake.*

Ouch. The people of Haiti have had their share of trembling because the earth has certainly been shaking.

Even though I spent a fair amount of time doing OSA work and pastoral things this week—vestry meeting, a funeral, two hospital visits, a stop at a parishioner's home—the relief work on behalf of École le Bon Samaritain has been ever present, too.

Paul tells his friends in Corinth that “we have such a hope, we act with great boldness...” What a terrific statement, what a terrific concept.

Maybe I've said this before, I can't remember. We usually think of Hope as something anticipating the future. I hope tomorrow is a nice day; I hope I pass the test; I hope I win the lottery. You know what I mean. Hope takes us from the present and shrouds us in the warmth of goodness and pleasure for the future. And, there is that famous Pauline line from 1st Corinthians, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

I kind of wish Paul had said as much in that letter about Hope as we does about love. Be that as it may, I've come to know Hope in a distinctly different way, not about fulfillment in the future at all. Rather, *Hope is a way of being. Hope is something alive and beating deep in the muscle of the Heart, warming and comforting the essence of Soul, inhaling and exhaling as the breath of Spirit.* I'm talking about the charisma that is Hope. You know the word charisma? A divine gift. In other words, Hope is lived as a divine gift.

As such, Hope transforms the most horrific darkness into a beacon ... here and now. Just go to Carrefour and let the light of Hope shine on your face through the eyes of a sick child, a distressed father, a grandmother who has survived the loss of her whole family. Stand under the camouflage awning outside l'Eglise d'Ascension in Carrefour and sway with the people and sing the hymns of praise and thanksgiving and, yes, Hope, only yards from collapsed buildings.

Not one, but two mountain-top experiences are assigned for today's lessons—Moses, the skin of whose face shines and Jesus, whose face changes and his clothes become dazzling white. In Moses and in Jesus is the Hope I'm talking about. Each is the light of Hope and each knows the presence of divine Spirit in and on, around and though.

Likewise, if Hope beams from the faces of wounded, hungry, and tired Haitians, those who resupply Hope to them come right out of this congregation and others nearby. The charisma of Hope—exactly the same as the glow on Moses' face and in the dazzling of Jesus' *Being*—kneels down to care for and minister to the hundreds who seek help at our Clinic.

Those who have and will go to Haiti have their own mountain-top experiences. It's impossible to side-step the impact of Carrefour and the people of Haiti at any time and especially post-January 12th. In the past few days I've debriefed with Jim Doucette, Dr. Dave Walker, nurse Vic Tolentino, physical therapist Lauren Lyons. Each is profoundly changed. Each is grateful for what she or he brought to Haiti and saddened not to have done more.

They and we have acted with great boldness. We have peered into the mirror and seen Haitian faces of Hope staring back at us. Truly, the glory of God's presence is reflected through that mirror.

Amen.

Copyright © 2010. Erl G. Purnell
All rights reserved.