



# Creole Crusts

## **Lenten Devotions** Written by Pam Mann

*Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than  
a house full of feasting with strife.*

*Proverbs 17:1*

Lord, order my day according to your purpose. Make me effective for your kingdom, efficient according to your time, available to your people, vigilant for your appearing, courageous and clever against all that opposes you.





Lenten devotions can be a lot like New Year's resolutions. You start out with the best intentions and then too easily lose your resolve to continue. I do hope that, if you've troubled to pick up this little booklet of forty devotions, you will read it through to the end. These enclosed stories allow Dave and me to share our ministry with you. We want you, as someone who makes our work in Ouanaminthe possible, to know the richness of our lives here in Haiti. We believe the more you understand, the better you will pray. The more you pray, the more we all will share in the deep satisfaction of being about God's business.

In the past I have written devotionals where the publisher assigned me Bible texts. I then wrote fictional vignettes to depict the Scriptural themes. This booklet, however, happened differently. The stories came first, out of real-life experience, and then, upon recording them, their inherent biblical vein emerged. I have not changed the names of those involved so that you may pray for them by name. In translating Creole and French conversations into English, I strove to be concise and true to the speaker's main point rather than being literal.

I am no journalist. I make no attempt here to report unbiased news. Regrettably, therefore, you will read only what I have experienced and what God teaches me through it. A better writer could report to you the daily lives of Hugues Bastien, Joe Dumay and Jaccin Bernard, the founding administrators of Institution Univers. In my regular routine, I interact with them only in passing, even though the art room is directly across the hall from the office area. Thus my story rarely coincides directly with theirs. Likewise, I regret that, though Dave and I live in the second floor apartment of Universe Medical Center (UMC), I have no involvement with the ministry of the clinic staff and therefore no stories to relate about them. However, the men and women, serving both at College Univers and at UMC, have my highest respect. Both their upbringing and current struggles are so foreign to my own that I cannot help but be mystified by their tenacious buoyancy. Living daily between a rock and a hard place, they need and merit our support. Dave and I are grateful and proud to be part of a community committed to that support.

Lent is about dying to self so that we can better live as Christ intends. It's a second honeymoon opportunity with the lover of our souls, a time to rekindle intimacy. Sometimes we love Him best when we move close "to the least of these his brothers." Go ahead. Risk deeper involvement, greater commitment. From my experience, it's worth the sacrifice.

Pam Mann  
January 2009

Ash Wednesday, February 25, 2009

## Clinic Treasure

Text: Matthew 6:19-21

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*”



“The cleaning lady for the clinic building stole food and clothes from our apartment. A third of our stuff is gone!” I was indignant. I felt violated. Hugues simply stared at me. He seemed pensive, slow to respond.

“How do you know she is the thief?”

I breathed out an impatient sigh. “She showed up for work today wearing my clothes! I recognized them and confronted her about the theft. She had the gall to tell me that I should be thankful that more was not taken!”

Hugues could not help smiling ever so slightly at this. He was definitely not feeling my pain. He finally nodded his head. “There’s always such a temptation to steal when you’re poor.”

I wondered what he was implying. I’m so rich I can have my clothes stolen periodically? I said nothing because I didn’t want to say something I’d regret later.

“You can easily replace what she stole, can’t you?”

I nodded, though frustrated by his indifference to my loss.

“Good thing your real treasure is in heaven.” He smiled. I didn’t. I was too irritated at being robbed and, frankly, my heart was in the wrong place.

It was months before I could acknowledge that I really had not put Jesus’ words about treasures into practice. I’ve got quite a big chunk of my life not built on the rock.



Thursday, February 26, 2009

**Fasting Day**

Text: Joel 2:12-14

*“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting and weeping and mourning.”*

*Rend your heart and not your garments.*

*Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.*

*Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing—  
grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God.*



“Madame Pamela, I won’t be here tomorrow for summer camp,” Jaslin informed me as he gathered up the day’s art project. He gave me a big smile. I marveled silently at his beautiful teeth untouched by dental care.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“My whole family is fasting all day tomorrow,” he explained.

“Kids included?”

“Kids included. We’re in the family.”

I had heard of family fasts before. They always make me think of calling children’s services which doesn’t exist here.

“Can’t you come to summer camp and fast, too?” I asked.

“No.” He gave me a you’re-not-too-bright look. “Fasting is eating nothing so you can pray a lot. My father wants us all to do it. He says God blesses people who pray with their whole hearts like that.”

In hindsight I see that I should have affirmed their piety but at the time I was too fussed up about skinny Jaslin not eating all day. “Okay,” I said with unmasked reluctance. “I’ll look for you the day after tomorrow.”

Before he turned to go, he addressed my unspoken concern. “It’ll be okay,” he assured me. “Fasting is easy for us. It’s the praying that’s hard.”

He left me thinking. If Haitians taught Americans to fast and pray, would we even comprehend their first step?

Friday, February 27, 2009

## **Mango Tree**

Text: Rev. 22:1-5

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*



We were packed tight as banana bunches going to market and getting overripe. I was glad to be in a single plastic chair, no matter how cracked, because the pew people were forever squeezing in one more late worshipper. The poor folks on the ends struggled to keep one cheek on the bench. When Jhonny announced that next week, God willing, barring inclement weather, we'd meet under the mango tree, people cheered Amen.

I arrived early the next Sunday without Dave. His habit was to come only for the two to three hour service, such a wimp. I liked to take in communion and adult Sunday School as well, due more to cultural curiosity than spiritual appetite. Pastor Clervil greeted me and we talked while lugging benches from last week's little meeting room to the big mango tree beside a rusting ship container.

"You know, this is a dedicated tree," he said after we positioned a bench under its branches. He pointed to the base of its ample trunk. "That was a hole, rotted through. Something had devoured the heart of the tree. Leaves were dying and falling off. But we had the idea to dedicate this space to the Lord. We couldn't afford a proper church building large enough so if the Lord could save the tree, we could worship in its shade. We prayed and we prayed. Then the hole began to fill in. The leaves came back until the tree is stronger than it was. Now this place is holy. Nobody pees here. We chase animals away. It's set apart for God."

I studied the miracle patch on the trunk's bark. Amazing. I imagined God enjoying very much being worshipped around a tree with new life.

Saturday, February 28, 2009

## **Transformational Fasting**

Text: John 12:24-28

*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*

*“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”*



The Sunday morning service under the mango tree was coming to a close. Brother Jhonny encouraged everyone to join in the forty days of fasting and prayer. This involved no eating during daylight hours, only drinking water, followed by a light soup supper after sundown.

“Fasting seems to give clearer access to the heart of God,” Jhonny said. There were two chickens squawking in the branch above Jhonny’s head but everyone ignored them. When a stray dog, however, came to investigate the ruckus, stooped Koko, always seated in her same cracked chair, shoed him out of the assembly.

Undaunted by the animal activity, Jhonny continued. “Prayer with fasting gives you better insight into your life situation. I know many people pray and fast to gain something from God’s hand: health, prosperity or material gain. While it’s understandable to desire these things, we must ask in our praying what God himself desires most for us. And what is that?” Jhonny perused our faces, seeking a response. Then he answered his own question, “A transformed life. That’s what God desires. That’s what will glorify him most. How many people truly long for that? To die to self, to then be remade with God’s priorities in mind? The transformed are the truly rich, the truly healthy. Transformation by God’s Spirit...that’s the real goal of our prayer and fasting, to become what God desires.”

Am I, who am so easily diverted by animals in church, also off track in prayer? How ready am I to abandon my well-reasoned personal agenda to embrace radical spiritual restructuring? If I do not willingly, eagerly give God this total access to my soul, do I not make myself God in his place?

Sunday, March 1, 2009

## **The Old Rugged Cross**

*On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
The emblem of suffering and shame;  
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best  
For a world of lost sinners was slain.*

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it one day for a crown.*

*O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,  
Has a wondrous attraction for me;  
For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above  
To bear it to dark Calvary.*

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it one day for a crown.*

*In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,  
A wondrous beauty I see,  
For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,  
To pardon and sanctify me.*

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it one day for a crown.*

*To the old rugged cross I will ever be true;  
Its shame and reproach gladly bear;  
Then He'll call me some day to my home far away,  
Where his glory forever I'll share.*

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it one day for a crown*

Monday, March 2, 2009  
**Evangelistic Zeal**  
Text: 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

*As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says,*

*"In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*



"Brother Dave!" Jean Jean called to us from across the street. It was late afternoon. We were walking home from school. Jean Jean's long thin legs strode easily toward us. His fistful of faded photocopies flapped in the wind. Excitedly he explained his mission for the day. "I'm evangelizing! Check it out."

Jean Jean, a tall thirty something, had been baptized only a few months earlier at the church, with an amazing mango tree, which we attended on the edge of town. He handed us a sample flyer. His photo was in the corner surrounded by text which introduced him as a recent convert to Christianity. The text explained that, at no cost whatsoever, the reader, too, could leave a life of bondage to sin, as Jean Jean had done, and be made right with God. It was the best thing that had ever happened to Jean Jean and it could happen to anyone, absolutely free of charge. The blood of Jesus covers everything. You pay nothing. Jean Jean had added his cell phone number so readers could call him if they had any questions.

"How do you like it?" Jean Jean asked. Dave and I exchanged glances, each hoping the other had an apt response.

"It's great," Dave said. "You make it clear that the salvation is free for everyone."

Jean Jean seemed gratified, snatched the paper from Dave's hand and hurried off.

Hmm, I am way too timid about sharing the good news I know. If I had half Jean Jean's zeal, I'd be telling a lot more people than I am where to get a great bargain.



Tuesday, March 3, 2009

**Upper Room**

Text: Hebrews 10:35-39

*So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while,*

*“He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith.*

*And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.*



The new Sunday morning service 5:30-7:00 a.m. was intended to attract people who lived near the town square. We fit the demographic and had decided to give it a try. “Come at 6 then,” Jhonny advised. “5:30 is the time for people who aren’t punctual.”

The sanctuary was on the floor above the Clervil home. Madame Clervil, unembarrassed about being half-dressed, she kissed and greeted us on her front porch. We said that we’d see ourselves upstairs. The narrow staircase of irregular rough cement steps ascended east half the flight to a tiny landing where normally the dog lay. Due to the previous night’s heavy rain through the open ironwork, the steps were soaked. Neither the dog nor any handrail appeared. Just going up to worship was an act of faith. A quick glance upstairs told us that we were the first to arrive.

The raised chancel area boasted new tile and a freshly stained wood podium. The central seating area remained rough and untiled, the cement walls and ceiling unpainted. Through the windows, open unframed squares, flooded the rising sunlight. As a rule, the first arrivals have the responsibility of beginning worship, so Dave and I got out our Creole hymnals and sang. When Jean Jean and Jhonny arrived, they prayed. Eight people had gathered when Jhonny reminded us of the importance of believers’ meeting where evil is strong. “Even only two or three have great power because Jesus is in the midst of them. Just last night, the rain did not deter the midnight parade to the cemetery. They exalted the power of death, honoring the voodoo spirits and cursing life. We who are the people of the Light, by God’s grace, must encourage one another to hold firm to the hope within us!”

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

## **Firm to the End**

Text: Revelation 3:7-13

*To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:*

*These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*



The preacher took the floor, unfinished though it was. His sermon text concerned the weak but faithful church at Philadelphia. “We too are weak,” he said after reading the text, “but by God’s grace we can hold firm to His Word. In fact, His grace is perfected in our weakness. Jesus is coming very soon. Do not be discouraged by the increasing evil around us. Hold firm to the end.

“In every decision we make, we must ask not what is best for ourselves or even our families or our country, but what is best for the kingdom of God? How can I best serve my Redeemer because my life is His, not my own.

“One Christian mother told me without shame that she always reminds her daughter, before she goes out, to put a condom in her purse. ‘How can you school your own daughter in immorality?’ I asked this confused woman.

“‘I don’t want her to die with AIDS,’ she told me.

“‘Dear woman,’ I said to her, ‘Your daughter is already dead. You train her in death. I would rather my daughter be physically dead and alive in Christ.’

“The mother would not listen. The ways of the world were too easy and natural for her. Choosing death is easy. It’s everywhere with many enticing faces. Do not be deceived. Jesus is coming soon. Hold firm. Stand fast to the end. He will give you the strength you need.”

Thursday, March 5, 2009

## Lamb Sacrifice

Text: Hebrews 10:4-10

*...because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:*

*“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.*

*Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.’ “[First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*



Wilkerby regularly looks for ways to get his classmates in more trouble than he is. “Venaldo says that bloody lamb can’t be Jesus. It’s voodoo to sacrifice lambs.”

“I didn’t say that!” Venaldo protested.

“Lots of religions sacrifice animals,” I tried to distract them from arguing. “Even the people of God in the Old Testament sacrificed animals. Christians don’t do that anymore because Jesus was our Lamb, sacrificed once for all.” I pointed again to the lamb I had drawn on the chalkboard. “Christian artists use a picture of the bleeding Lamb to represent Jesus being sacrificed so his blood could rescue us.”

“I don’t like it,” Wilkerby had no use for subtlety.

“No problem,” I said, pretending patience. “Choose another picture that you’d like to draw.”

“I want to make a heart with a cross in it.”

“Fine. Why do you chose that?”

“Because I don’t like Venaldo’s voodoo lamb.”

Venaldo protested, “It’s *not* a voodoo lamb.”

“Of course, it’s not,” I concurred. “Wilkerby, once and for all, the Lamb is Jesus. No more voodoo talk, please.”

“Well,” said Wilkerby, always needing the last word, “I’m putting a cross in a heart to show Jesus is in my heart.” Venaldo and I looked at each other, dubious. How long until Wilkerby would upgrade Jesus to his mouth?

Friday, March 6, 2009

## Flood Proof

Text: Mark 10:17-27

*As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

*“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’[a]”*

*“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”*

*Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

*At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

*Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”*

*The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is] to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”*



The visiting evangelist from Gonaive stood to address the congregation. He was easily six six and thin as a broomstick. No previous preacher had stretched so far into the mango branches. When he smiled, the lower half of his head nearly disappeared in a toothy white flash. He shared firsthand about the destruction that the August ‘08 hurricanes had wreaked on his hometown. “In a matter of minutes,” he said, “beautiful living rooms with fine furniture were swept away in muddy flood waters. People who had been seduced by the love of material goods, the power of money and position, were left homeless. One man lost a fleet of twelve buses in one hour. What good did their riches do them?”

He stretched and strutted toward the congregation, speaking French, as he described the excesses of the rich. Then, to lay out the contrasting biblical lifestyle, he crouched near the make-shift altar and stage-whispered in Creole. The assembly showered him with Amens for encouragement.

Several times he asked us to turn to our neighbor to repeat a question or statement. Personally, I hate this manipulative technique, but it’s a well-loved church game here. “You lack one thing,” we said to each other. I couldn’t gripe at that one, Jesus’ own words to the rich young ruler of Mark 10.

“God knows you need money but don’t love it. Money’s a good servant but a poor master. Fall in love with money and you will be disappointed. Build your life instead on an eternal foundation. On the last day, you will stand. You will not be swept away.”

Saturday, March 7, 2009

## Young Intercessors

Text: 1 Peter 5:7

*As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

*"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"*

*"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."*

*Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

*At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

*Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"*

*The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

*The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"*

*Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."*



It had been a full two and a half months since the fourth grade Previl boys went missing, presumed dead at the hands of kidnappers in league with an uncle. Instead of the usual English prayer to open our fourth grade English class, I prayed in Creole. I did my best to make my prayer sound Haitian, loud, frantic and emotional. When I prayed for the boys, several of the children prayed aloud with me. Praying aloud along with the designated prayer leader is also typical of Haitian prayer style...a feature yet to be observed when I pray in English. When I said Amen, most repeated Amen. But several continued to pray. I opened my eyes to see the extra-milers waving their arms as grown-up Haitian evangelicals do in prayer. How do children process the stories of violence perpetrated against their classmates? As the students sat to begin class, I hoped they were pondering the VBS song I had just begun to teach that week from 1 Peter 5:7- Cast away your troubles. Throw them all away. Give them to the Lord your God. He's with us everyday.

It's easy to despair when society does not protect the weak nor avenge them. Mightier than despair is stubborn love that keeps praying and refuses to give up. That prayer calls forth protection that society cannot give.

Sunday, March 8, 2009

### **Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow**

*Cross of Jesus, cross of sorrow,  
Where the blood of Christ was shed,  
Perfect man on thee did suffer,  
Perfect God on thee has bled!*

*Here the King of all the ages,  
Throned in light ere worlds could be,  
Robed in mortal flesh is dying,  
Crucified by sin for me.*

*Evermore for human failure  
By His passion we can plead;  
God has borne all mortal anguish,  
Surely He will know our need.*

*Cross of Jesus, cross of sorrow,  
Where the blood of Christ was shed,  
Perfect man on thee did suffer,  
Perfect God on thee has bled!*

### **Print Thine Image**

*Print thine image, pure and holy,  
On my heart, O Lord of Grace;  
So that nothing, high or lowly,  
Thy blest likeness can efface.  
Let the clear inscription be:  
Jesus crucified for me,  
And the Lord of all creation,  
Be my refuge and salvation.*

Monday, March 9, 2009

## Christian Reproof

Text: 1 John 4:9-11

*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*



What started out as, frankly, a boring Sunday School lesson on reconciliation ended up quite memorable. Several heads were nodding off when Mme. Gerald hopped up to affirm Jhonny's teaching. "Yes! Mature Christians reprove one another in gentleness!" Poor Jhonny, trying to continue, had barely recovered from that outburst, when, across the room, Mme. Hensot shouted, "What can a mature Christian do when the person you've offended avoids you?" She looked pointedly at Mme. Gerald, their gazes locked. Suddenly everyone understood.

Mme. Gerald, who hadn't been to the communion table in months, now rushed beside it. Rapid fire she launched into a defense of her behavior in the women's ministry. As she directed her discourse to the predominately male side of the assembly, the women's side began to buzz angrily.

At least, everyone was awake now. Sunday School had become suddenly quite interesting.

"Church, God bless you!" Jhonny yelled. In the pews people ignored him and argued animatedly. Again Jhonny shouted the same line. Normally "God bless you!" is code among Haitian evangelicals for listen up. After two more attempts, there was still muttering. How could a lesson on Christian community go so awry?



Tuesday, March 10, 2009  
**One Body**  
Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by] one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

*Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*

*The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*



Apparently everyone had an opinion about the division that had arisen among the women. The rift had eaten into choirs, Bible study groups, evangelism and service efforts. Finally the feuding voices seemed to fade. Brother Edward, broad-shouldered and somber, stood. Slowly he stared the congregation into silence. He had been a frequent teacher at the little Sance church, until, six months prior when he left, disgruntled over a decision involving church property improvements. His mere presence that morning spoke of reconciliation. He asked, “May I speak as a man in his own house?” After a spattering of Amens, he simply read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Though normally verbose, he added no commentary. Even the babies and chickens had quit squawking.

Then came the miracle. With no visible prompting, Mme. Gerald and Mme. Hernsot each rose, walked toward each other and enacted what Edward read. They hugged, held hands and spoke softly to each other. Together they beckoned a third woman, Sister Rose, to join them. Hand in hand, they (*cont.*)

listened as Edward read, “Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.”

Normally Haitian handkerchiefs dust seats or wipe sweat. The morning the Holy Spirit hijacked Sunday School class, hankies around the room wiped eyes and dabbed runny noses. The three reconciling women dried each other eyes. It was long past time to transition from Sunday School into the worship hour but no one seemed to care.

Wednesday, March 11, 2009

### **Exhortations**

Text: Ephesians 4:1-6

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*



“Before we pray, “ Jhonny said to the newly reconciled women, “listen as the Church speaks to you.” Turning to the assembly, he added, “Gently.” At Jhonny’s nod, one member after another stood and shared.

“You are mothers to all of us,” said one young man. “We learn what faith is watching how you live.”

An older gentleman warned, “Don’t expect others to love you as God does, especially when you yourself know that you are not forgiving as God has forgiven you. Forgive. Then you will be free.”

“I don’t even know what the hubbub was all about,” complained a new member to the women’s group, “but I need to grow in my faith! I’m glad we’re putting this distraction behind us. Now we can get back to what God wants us to do.”

Then people began to speak about leaving the whole affair behind and moving on, never to dig it up again. At this, Sister Rose bristled and broke from the circle, stepping away from the other women. She crossed her arms and thrust her chin out. “I can’t pretend it never happened. That would be a lie. It happened! I won’t pretend it didn’t. That’s just dishonest hypocrisy.”

Jhonny spoke gently. “Honesty is good. Be truthful. Be honest about the hurt. But, at the same time, be strong enough to do the hard work of forgiving. Take your hurt to the cross. Let God’s forgiveness put your hurt in perspective and heal it.”

She inhaled and exhaled deeply. Then she stepped toward her two sisters and again took their hands.

Thursday, March 12, 2009  
**Confession and Forgiveness**  
Text: 2 Corinthians 13:11-12

*Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.  
Greet one another with a holy kiss.*



The three reconciling women knelt, arms intertwined. Jhonny began to pray. The entire assembly slipped to its knees on the rough cement, leaning into the cracked plastic chairs and wobbly wooden benches on which they had been sitting. Boisterous simultaneous prayers reverberated in the two-car garage-sized room: pleas for deliverance from division, laments over wounds inflicted by unforgiveness, petitions for humble empowerment and dependence on grace.

When the prayers waned, Jhonny invited the women to stand, to publicly confess and to publicly forgive. When Mme. HERNOT said, "If I have done anything wrong," she was interrupted and instructed to repeat, "I acknowledge that I have sinned against you." After each confession, they kissed each other on the lips. There was a flash. Someone had a camera with them! That never happened before.

Brother Edward began in his rich deep voice to sing "Jesus took my burden and made my heart rejoice." Before the last verse ended, the women's group swarmed around their newly reunited leaders. Soon the entire church was hugging, kissing, weeping again and then laughing giddily, high on repentance and forgiveness.

Once the congregation was reseated, Jhonny suggested a party with cookies in the afternoon to celebrate what God had done this morning. "We got no money for that!" a woman shouted from the back. Jhonny looked briefly crestfallen but then the woman added, "We've already had a great celebration." Jhonny nodded his assent. End of discussion.



Friday, March 13, 2009

**To Be Continued**

Text: Romans 12:9-18

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*



Jhonny checked his cell phone for the time and announced that there'd be no sermon since the Spirit had already made a special delivery. "We'll conclude today with announcements and one anthem from Group Star," he said. That was the young women's singing Bible study group.

After announcements, visitors introduced themselves. One hefty woman, just in from working in the Dominican Republic, zipped through her intro and added, "I feel at home here already. I have to tell you I have an estranged friend. I can't wait now to meet her and be reconciled." Smiling faces bobbed approvingly.

Then came the Holy Spirit's last laugh. Jhonny called forward Group Star. Eight slender, high-heeled twenty-something women strolled to the very place where the older generation had just made its peace.

Nadege, the lead singer, smiled at the congregation. Then, before she could start the group, the anthem began without her. An alto at the far end of the ensemble tried to herd the floundering voices by loudly singing something different from the others. This only silenced Nadege completely and heightened her alarm. The resulting dissonance was visually reinforced by unsynchronized dance steps. Ill-fitting second-hand shoes shuffled on top of each other and over the holy ground of reconciliation. The audience could only cringe at the reminder that unity would be an on-going effort.

Saturday, March 14, 2009  
**Visionary Builders (Hugues)**  
Text: Colossians 1:3-14

*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

*For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*



No individual has amazed us more in our tenure with IU than Hugues Bastien, its founder and director. Four other young Haitian men joined him in the early years but Hugues has consistently been the driving force, especially in its long-range vision and relationship with US supporters. Hugues embodies cross-cultural ministry both in his person as a Haitian-born US citizen and in his passion, the connection of US resources with Haitian needs. He works all hours at a job few could manage. He deals regularly by phone, e-mail or in person with folks from Canada, the US and the DR in addition to his Haitian neighbors. To do this, he moves from French and Creole to English and Spanish. Still, he rarely seems too busy to stop and hear kindergartners ramble about their day.

Sunday, March 15, 2009

## **Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross**

*Jesus, keep me near the cross, there's a precious fountain;  
Free to all, a healing stream flows from Calv'ry's mountain.*

*In the cross, in the cross be my glory ever;  
Till my ransomed soul shall find rest beyond the river.*

*Near the cross, a trembling soul, love and mercy found me;  
There the bright and morning star sheds its beams around me.*

*In the cross, in the cross be my glory ever;  
Till my ransomed soul shall find rest beyond the river.*

*Near the cross! O Lamb of God, bring its scenes before me;  
Help me walk from day to day with its shadow o'er me.*

*In the cross, in the cross be my glory ever;  
Till my ransomed soul shall find rest beyond the river.*

*Near the cross I'll watch and wait, hoping, trusting ever,  
Till I reach the golden strand just beyond the river.*

*In the cross, in the cross be my glory ever;  
Till my ransomed soul shall find rest beyond the river.*



Monday, March 16, 2009

## Sangfroid

Text: Colossians 3:12-17

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*



It wasn't the first time I'd come into Joe's office in a huff. I had never intended to teach high school English. I preferred elementary kids, the littler the better. They're more eager than older kids. But, in a magnanimous moment of weakness, however, I'd consented to teach eleventh grade since Joe was strapped for a teacher. I recounted with indignation the latest effrontery perpetrated by my students. Again I was at my wit's end. "I just don't have the..." I was debating how to fill in the blank: the know-how to motivate them, the understanding of their situation to connect with them, the...

"Sangfroid," Joe finished my sentence. That shut me up. Humph. I knew Joe thought Pastor Dave was Mr. Sangfroid. I suddenly felt inadequate by comparison, though still annoyed. What? It was my fault these students made me crazy?

Joe launched into a discourse on the unmined ability of the average Haitian student. "I know they're not where they should be compared to their peers in other countries which have libraries, museums and educational TV. But they have a determination of which wealthier, more pampered teenagers know nothing. Don't give up on them. I will support you in every discipline decision you make but don't let the fact that they're difficult stop you. Focus on those who show the most effort. Encourage them. Praise them in front of the others. Fuel the fire in them. No one perseveres like a Haitian student with a little support." (My condensed version of his speech.)

Well, I left with more sangfroid, cooler blood, and a lot to think about.

Tuesday, March 17, 2009

**Pray “n” Pay (Jaccin)**

Text: Galatians 6:1-10

*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.*

*Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.*

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*



Jaccin Bernard has the reputation of being a praying man. In our first months living in Haiti, he listened to him pray every morning on a local radio station. Whether it's someone sick in his office or a gather of a thousand parents, people look to Jaccin to pray. His clear, calm voice utters French or Creole petitions with the same easy sincerity.

Jaccin is also known as the man to see at Univers if you can't pay your tuition bill. Maybe it's his lifetime of praying but somehow he sorts the con artists from the true indigents. The man with a salaried job, Jaccin scolds. "You get a paycheck twice a month. At Christmas you got a bonus and yet not one gourde have you paid toward your children's schooling this year! If you do not pay, they will be sent home."

With others who are down on their luck, he patiently listens to their stories, verifies their content, and often awards half or sometimes full scholarships. Others, joining the flow in and out of Jaccin's office, include the kitchen staff. There are days when it's not only the rice and beans heating up in the kitchen. Jaccin has served as peacemaker for them as well as smoothing ruffled feathers among primary and preschool staffs at times. Having an office next door to Jaccin's, Dave regularly overhears these conversations and thanks God for an insightful, wise colleague.

Wednesday, March 18, 2009

## **Defense against the Devil**

Text: James 5:13-16

*Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*



“There’s fire! Too many people! Get me out of here!”

The teachers and the other seventh graders listened in horror to Wisline’s ranting. Normally she was pleasant and very reserved. This was no classroom antic. Gently the administrators coaxed her out of the room and downstairs to the main office. No psychiatric care exists in the entire region. Her parents could not be reached. They, like half the city, were in Dajabon for Friday market day. Hugues and Jaccin tried to calm the girl while feeling themselves alarmed by her bizarre behavior.

Jaccin apparently had experience in exorcism. When recounting what happened, Jaccin was joined by his listeners in reciting the order used to cast out demons. He was emphatic that demon must be ordered out in Jesus’ name. The others nodded.

Hugues and Jaccin did pray for Wisline too. After some minutes, she regained her senses. Again she could remember who and where she was. Though she seemed calm, the administrators sent her to the sick room to rest. In a country where sorcery is overtly practiced, Haitian Christians seem to have a keener sense of demonic activity than we. The two administrators decided to pray with each high school class in the following days. If, as it seemed, Satan was assaulting students, the school would double its defenses with more prayer.



Thursday, March 19, 2009

## Haitian Illegals

Text: Hebrews 11:13-16

*All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*



It was the first Sunday of the year. Dave, Hugues and I were walking to the big two-towered Baptist church on Rue Espagnole. We walked through the town square, marveling at how well it had been maintained since refurbishing the previous July. A real sense of civic pride seemed to be emerging. Then, on the far side of the square, I noticed the huge crowd, mostly young males milling about with a small bag each.

“There must hundreds,” Hugues said. “They tried Friday to return to the DR (Dominican Republic) after spending the holidays with family here in Haiti. The DR border officials started hassling them as illegals until the Catholic priest in Dajabon gave them refuge in the church. He tried to reason with the authorities. The immigrant labor is needed in northwest DR for harvesting crops. It’s work Dominicans don’t want and Haitians crave. They slept in the Catholic church here last night but now mass is going on. So they’re in the street.”

“Well, what will happen to them?” I asked.

“The priests will get them in eventually. The Dominican economy needs them.”

Two hours later, as we walked home from church, only the locals walked the town square. “The farm workers must have gotten across the border,” Dave said. “What a life!”

We’re all sojourners in this life but certainly some of us feel its transient reality more than others.

Friday, March 20, 2009

## **The Row Row**

Text: James 4:1-10

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

*You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?] But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:*

*"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*



In eleventh grade English class, our lesson was writing if/then statements contrary to fact. For his example, Windy offered, "If I were President, I would change my country by making more schools and more hospitals."

"And more prisons," added Venix, sitting in front of Windy.

Jerry, at Windy's left, laughed. They both were giving Windy a hard time about being combative that afternoon. Jerry's sentence had been "If Windy were a policeman, he would beat everybody." Windy, however, assured us that he would only beat the thieves. So much for human rights.

Since my arrival in the classroom, law and order seemed to be the theme or, rather, lawlessness and disorder. The class was normally arranged in typical self-selected gender segregation: three rows of girls to one side and three rows of boys to the other. In defiance of the status quo, Stephane and Junior had pushed their desks from the back of the room to form a fourth boys' row. "There's not enough aisle space left!" Windy complained. He was particularly agitated because Stephane's new desk position was within inches of his.

I left the hubbub continue a few minutes in case they might actually resolve the situation themselves. But tempers remained heated, expressions belligerent. Finally, Stephane brought in the assistant principal to mediate. It seemed to me that he did very little listening to either party. Before acting, he glanced at me. "Arrange them however you'd like," (*cont.*)

I said with upraised Pontius Pilate hands. “I just want to teach them English.” He quickly sent the two “aggressors” back to their original territory and exited. I couldn’t decide if the classroom behavior mimicked a preschool spat or global politics. Hmm, probably no difference there. No wonder Lynne-Dachka’s sample English sentence was “If I were President, I would make peace in the country.”

Saturday, March 21, 2009

**White House**

Text: John 14:1-4

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”*



Starting with my first solo trip to the Ouanaminthe market, the two-story white house at the corner of Market Street became my landmark. After shopping, a bulging bag on each shoulder, I would need to get my bearings to head home. In the early months, I easily got lost in the maze of stalls and crooked paths. Spying the flat top of the white house, often bedecked with drying laundry, always reassured me that I would find my way home. While I loved the market for its potential in cross-cultural adventure, it often wore me out. Especially initially, rare were the people who could look beyond the white foreigner to embrace me as a person. One such person I would discover living in the two-story white house.

One Saturday morning, walking to market, I was surprised to see an elementary IU student, Samuel Alcius, standing in the doorway of the big white house. Then I was further amazed to discover that it was his home. Most of the IU students and teachers live in two-room houses with less square footage than our apartment. Samuel and his younger brother, Daniel, were wealthy by comparison. Samuel introduced me to his father, a linebacker-sized man in his forties with an easy smile. I liked him immediately, the apt though unwitting keeper of my lighthouse guiding me home.

Sunday, March 22, 2009

## **When I Survey the Wondrous Cross**

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss  
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast  
Save in the death of Christ, my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.*

*See, from his head, his hands, his feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all!*



Monday, March 23, 2009  
**Disabled Gratitude**  
Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

*Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*



A warm exchange of morning greetings each Saturday became our habit. Mr. Alcius was seldom absent from his wholesale food store that filled the first floor of the two-story white house. I likewise was a regular Saturday visitor to the market. Sometimes we had impromptu parent-teacher conferences which clearly delighted the proud papa. Samuel was by far the brightest boy in his class and an exceptional artist with an eye for realistic detail. Daniel, a younger year, though not stellar was well above average. It was easy for me to be complimentary of the Alcius children.

Then there was a period of weeks where I saw neither the children nor the father. Finally one Saturday Mr. Alcius again greeted at me at the white house. He rose to his feet with difficulty, one half of his body lagging behind the rest. Still he smiled at my shock. "I had a stroke," he explained. "How good God is to me! I could have easily died and yet God showed me grace. He preserved my life. I am still here with my family." Whatever I said in response was lame and forgettable. I was floored by his attitude. His sincere gratitude was more jarring than the first sight of his disability. I had so much more than he. Was I even half as grateful?



Tuesday, March 24, 2009

## How Life Is

Text: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.*



My plan was to ask questions that would give my sixth graders practice in English personal pronouns. Instead they gave me a lesson in Haitian perseverance. “Where is Coldweene?”

“I’m here!” she enunciated perfectly. Only Samuel Alcius could surpass her ability.

“Where is Samuel?” I asked, pointing out his empty seat.

The entire class answered, as drilled, “He’s not here.” Then I paused.

“Daniel, his brother, is not at school either,” I remembered aloud. Several children spoke in French or Creole at once but it was Coldweene who managed to dominate in English.

“His father die,” she said, obviously pleased to have put the info in English.

“He died?” I echoed, stunned. Many students giggled at my strong response. I switched to French, the required language of instruction for sixth grade. But I was too rattled and my French soon eroded into Creole. “I just saw him Saturday, smiling as always. He’s a very friendly man or was. Ah, I can’t believe it. But then I know he’d had a stroke.”

“That’s what killed him,” Coldweene said, speaking in Creole, following my bad example. “He had an attack on Saturday night and then on Monday morning he just dropped dead.”

I shook my head. Awareness of eyes upon me pulled me from my private thoughts. My incredulity at death was amusing to my students. “That’s how life is,” Joay-Loune, the class clown, gently reminded me.

I inhaled, exhaled and continued the English lesson with children more experienced in life and death than I.

Wednesday, March 25, 2009

**Attitude Legacy**

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:53-58

*For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." [a]*

*"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ] The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*



It was already after nine on Saturday. I wanted to get to market before all the produce was bought up. Thankfully it was overcast. I didn't have to fret about the rising sun roasting me. My thoughts were more on groceries than life and death when I saw the white house. No stacks of stuffed-full rice sacks out front. No laundry on the roof. All doors and windows were latched tight. The house lay lifeless as a tomb.

Next door was a coffin maker's shop. His door stood open for business. Passing by, I saw a shiny child-size coffin waiting. I personally have known of many deaths in my small sphere of activity and in my short stay thus far. Coffin-making may be one of the few businesses not dying here. I'm told that 54 is the average Haitian life expectancy. That makes Mr. Alcius below the average in life quantity, but his quality of life, especially his attitude, was superior. Especially in his last eight months, he practiced gratitude to God for his life. Surely God wants his sons to continue that legacy. In fact, I know God wants me to do the same. Defy difficulty; grow gratitude.



Thursday, March 26, 2009

## Simply Amazed

Text: Isaiah 35:3-10

*Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts,*

*“Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”*

*Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.*

*Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.*

*The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.*

*And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.*

*No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there.*

*But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD will return.*

*They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.*



For one dollar at a Columbus library discard sale, I bought *A Book of Opposites*. I suspected my Haitian English students would enjoy it but I had no idea how much. This is a culture which has minimal access to any books at all, much less a brightly colored picture book where a page with a narrow cut-out window first shows a thin yellow stripe only to transform when flipped, revealing a wide yellow stripe behind. With one particular sixth grade class, I wondered if the cleverness of the artist would be lost on them. Every set of eyes was fixed on the book, a nine inch square for a roomful of thirty-six students. I strolled across the front of the classroom so everyone had a chance to see somewhat. As people accustomed to sharing, they seemed content to observe from a distance.

When the flip of the windowed page transformed the small block-lettered “simple” into a complicated maze filling the next page, the children gasped, giggled and then applauded in delight. “Show it again!” “Yes, do it again!” Three times we replayed the magic. While I cherished their enthusiasm, my mind wandered to imagine the contrasting bored complacency of more privileged children with such a book.

Poverty isn’t only hunger and poor health, illiteracy and exposure to violence. It’s also less fun and limited access to knowledge.

Friday, March 27, 2009

### **Possible Problem**

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:8-10

*Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!*



“Chine-Flore, what is this?” I held her blank paper in front of her. It had been among the sixth grade art papers which I had just collected in the last hour from her class. I’d thought it fun, a colorful draw-cut-paste project. We stood alone in the hall where I’d pulled her from her classroom to investigate the mystery. Her assigned seat in the art room was at a table with three boys. Maybe they’d refused to share the glue with her.

Chine-Flore stared with her beautiful round eyes, her chin lowered. I waited, trying to be the picture of patience understanding. Finally she said, “All the paper I had to glue one was ruined.”

“It was all ruined? How?”

“I tried to cut it but it was ruined so I threw it all away.” I smiled slightly at how she made it sound like it had wrecked itself. Accepting personal responsibility for wrong here is as rare as running water.

“You said nothing to me.”

“Well, it was ruined!” She was reacting to my rule of no seconds on paper. Everybody gets the same single chance to make art with the same materials. Any mistakes simply require more creativity. Prior to this rule, the majority of the class wanted a second or third sheet.

So I gave Chine-Flore my standard speech about mistakes can often be redeemed or lead you to a better idea. I extracted a promise from her that she would not throw away her art again without checking with me. She probably didn’t get what I was talking about, but, since it’s as applicable to general living as art production, I will repeat many more times. God willing, in time, she’ll learn that many problems are simply possibilities that need better light.

Saturday, March 28, 2009

## **Chance of a Lifetime**

Text: Jeremiah 29:11

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*



Hugues, whom everyone at IU calls Met Pas, short for Teacher-Pastor, brought several books and CD packages back from the US for TOEFL test preparation (Teaching Of English as a Foreign Language). After December exams, Dave then helped all the terminal or thirteenth grade students organize into Christmas break study groups built around the key individuals who had access to both a computer and electric power. The overwhelming difficulty of the English level required discouraged all but the most fluent speakers from continuing.

The week prior to the actual exam Dave set up four of the administrators' lap tops in the IU office area for the top students, Frandy, Emmanuel, Ezechiel and Hantz-Jerry, to use after school. Dave figured they would spend an hour or two each day, working especially on oral comprehension and typing their written responses. Everyday they worked from three to seven! Dave had to push them so that he himself could go home.

I was concerned that their lives were getting out of balance. They were neglecting their regular coursework, becoming more nervous about their inabilities than gaining confidence about new strategies they'd acquired. “David, they're getting crazy,” I complained one night when he had arrived home again at 7:30. “They're going after this like their lives depended upon it.”

Dave gave me an incredulous stare-down. “Well, they do.” With that he was in the shower and I was left in thought. I hate the harshness of that reality. What a weight on their shoulders. This single event could open the door to a whole life of opportunity.



Sunday, March 29, 2009

## **The Cross**

*The cross before me to lead,  
The cross behind me to defend,  
The cross below me to uphold,  
The cross beside me to befriend,  
The cross above me to inspire,  
The cross within me to consume,  
O cross surround me with your power,  
Enfold my life, my soul, my all.*

*The cross each morning when I rise,  
The cross each evening while I sleep,  
The cross before my eyes,  
The cross upon my lips I speak,  
The cross be all that I would hear,  
The cross be all that I believe,  
The cross be with me in this life,  
The cross be with me when I leave.*

*The cross before me,  
The cross behind me,  
The cross is all I need.*



Monday, March 30, 2009

## Can Do

Text: Philippians 4:13, 19

*I can do everything through him who gives me strength. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*



Emmanuel Joseph came into Dave's office to pick up his passport. He and the three other top thirteenth grade students would go the next day to Cap Haitian to take the TOEFL exam. A photo ID, such as a passport, was required. IU students who had visited the US kept their passports in the school safe. "I'd like to see all four of you together before you go," Dave said. "Could you bring the others in during lunch break with you?"

Emmanuel thought the foursome would be amenable to that and, before noon, the group huddled in Dave's office. With Hugues' okay, Dave gave the boys a small personal gift to cover their bus fare and meals. "In addition to your families and friends here, many people in the US are praying for you. Let that knowledge encourage and calm you now. You have worked long and hard. Now it's time to trust in God's provision."

"It's in God's hands now," they agreed.

Dave encouraged them to stay positive and be supportive of each other on the trip there. They can be disparaging in trying to outdo each other. "You can keep this Scripture in mind." Dave sang for them, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

They quickly joined in, not singing as much as chanting the words in the song's rhythm. "Where is that verse, Pastor Dave?" Hantz-Jerry asked.

"Uhh, Philippians 3..." Dave grabbed his Bible, leafing to the reference. "Verse 19 perhaps? No, 13. But 19 is apt too. My God will supply all your needs according to His abundant riches in glory."

Two of them latched on to the former verse, two to the latter, chanting together to soak it into their spirits. They left the office, chanting rhythmically, a team energized and eager to take the field.

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

## Contentment

Text: Philippians 4:11-12

*I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*



It was one of those puzzling moments that a teacher has when the entire class, including the clowns, stare at the board in utter silence. Boom or bust, which is it? Their expressions indicated that the wheels were turning inside. I had already translated the quote in French and given a brief commentary. “He is richest who is content with the least,” from Socrates.

I asked for opinions of Socrates’ statement. Finally, Maucler bravely offered a comment, “I think Socrates in his time had this idea. It does not belong to our time.”

“I agree with you, Maucler. Socrates was not thinking of people who have nothing. He was thinking of people who have much and still want more.” I was amazed at how the eleventh grade class continued to stare at the sentence I had written on the chalkboard. Haitian students study introductory philosophy in their final high school year. But I thought eleventh graders would enjoy an early sample.

To get past the lull, I asked them to name kinds of wealth: access to information, health, personal freedom, which are in addition to and different from material goods. Finally I described the greed of the rich. “The man with one car wants two. The family with a big house wants a bigger house. Discontentment is a terrible sort of poverty which more goods will never cure.” Blank faces looked back at me.

Later, recounting the story to Dave, I realized that I personally value this quote because I have experienced its truth. Haitian teenagers are not going to easily comprehend the dangers of greed nor the rare contentment of those whose basic needs are met.

Wednesday, April 1, 2009

## **Paved Road**

Text: Romans 12:16-18

*Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*



A Friday afternoon with no primary teachers' meeting! Every colleague of mine was out the door with the kids before administrators could have second thoughts. Minutes after the noisy exodus into the weekend, Hugues showed up in Dave's office. I was there, eating cold rice and beans which one of the dear cafeteria ladies had left for me, after noticing that I hadn't shown up during the lunch hour. Always make friends with the cooks. One of them had even slipped me a bite of beef in my sauce.

"Where's Dave?"

"Upstairs." I pointed my spoon up. "Bible class." I resumed eating. It's generally Dave that Hugues needs to see.

Hugues sank into the chair where parents, coming to discuss tuition payment problems, usually sit. "There's no teachers' meeting?"

"Nope. Last week's went forever. We deserve a week off."

"Well, Joe just called. I should have stopped them before they left so we could meet."

I was immediately thankful everyone took off so fast until Hugues explained why. Apparently there was a grass roots movement afoot to urge the European Union road builders, who had laid the road from Cap Haitian to Ouanaminthe, to lay ten more kilometers of road within the city limits. After negotiations between city leaders and the EU company, some community participation was expected: 25 gourdes from every man, woman and child with the schools and businesses as collection centers. Hugues, though remembering community drives when IU had been burned by unkept promises, felt IU needed to pull its weight. "We'll announce the collection," he said. "And see what people give."

Humph. A paved road from the town square to the school. Could it really happen?

Thursday, April 2, 2009

## **Paved Sidewalk**

Text: James 3:13-18

*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*



It was Saturday morning at Ouanaminthe market. I was really pleased with the grapefruit I found. I even found a cabbage that wasn't half rotted for a decent price. Probably the cooler weather, rarely above 80 in recent weeks, was keeping the produce fresher. I caved to the persistent pleading of a woman, selling whole spices from her wheelbarrow. I didn't really need whole cloves and whole peppercorns but it was only ten gourdes. Besides Haitians love fresh-ground cloves in their vegetable sauces. Maybe we would too.

Suddenly I found myself at the main walkway near the hen house and meat market. I'd forgotten that just last week this area was transformed into a cemented sidewalk. Something in me longed for the former dusty dirt path that turned to a mud swamp after a hard rain. Somehow I actually liked the vast contrast between grocery shopping in Ouanaminthe compared to Columbus, Ohio. This new cement sidewalk just reduced the gap. It thwarted some insidious desire in me to preserve picturesque poverty.

I remembered the previous day's conversation with Hugues about the possible ten kilometers of paved road in town, including where the clinic and the school stood. An ugly part of me did not want that. US visitors would have less of a rude awakening to poverty if they walked on blacktop to our facilities. Do I want to end poverty or just play the humanitarian within it? Do I work with the poor in order to feel magnanimous and superior?

Friday, April 3, 2009  
**Well Washed**  
Text: Revelation 7:13-17

*Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”*

*I answered, “Sir, you know.”*

*And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

*Therefore, “they are before the throne of God*

*and serve him day and night in his temple;*

*and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.*

*Never again will they hunger;*

*never again will they thirst.*

*The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.*

*For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;*

*he will lead them to springs of living water.*

*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*



“What I can’t figure out is how they get the clothes so clean in such dirty water.” The visiting American, saying this, had been to the river near the school and seen laundry in process on its banks.

It is a very muddy river and the clothes do get very clean. It must be the soap that does the magic and the fact that many Haitians wash clothes three times before the final rinse. A bushel basket of laundry can take five hours of hand scrubbing. Despite their meager means, they purchase a range of detergents, softeners, deodorizers and rinse agents. In contrast to dusty roads, littered streets, run-down homes, Haitians are typically fastidious about their attire when going out. Garments must be laundered and pressed, shoes polished.

I’ve thought this contrast between people and their setting arises because the environment is vast to be controlled. An individual has hope of, at least, maintaining his personal appearance though his neighborhood may be in shambles. The distinction provides a metaphor for being in the world and not of the world. I imagine when the great multitude assembles before the throne, it will have been the Haitian believers that will have coached all the rest of us in getting our robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb. I’ll bet Haitians won’t even puzzle over how any blood could make robes white. They’ll just trust in a powerful cleaner and forget everything else.

Saturday, April 4, 2009

**Mission to Misery**

Text: Matthew 25:34-40

*“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’*

*“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’*

*“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’*



“I thought I knew what poverty was. I had an idea in my mind of what to expect. Then, walking through town, I was overwhelmed.” Bob had come with a US construction team to volunteer at the school. The walk happened on Sunday before their work week started. Monday morning Bob was wondering what he was doing here. It was all too much. But, since the flight home wasn’t until the weekend, he had to make the best of it, do what he could, get through one day at a time.

As often happens, Bob decided gradually that it didn’t matter that his contribution was insufficient to eliminate all the misery. He would do what he could and pray that God could manage the rest. At the end of the week, he was already talking about coming back the next year. At that point, he spoke more about the people than their poverty. It was their laughter and smiles that amazed him most. What did they find to be happy about? Would he be the same after having rubbed shoulders with them? Probably not. And that probably was a good thing, a God thing.

Palm Sunday, April 5, 2009

**Ride On, Ride On in Majesty!**

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
Hear all the tribes hosanna cry;  
O Savior meek, your road pursue,  
With palms and scattered garments strewed.*

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
In lowly pomp ride on to die.  
O Christ, your triumphs now begin  
O'er captive death and conquered sin.*

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
The winged squadrons of the sky  
Look down with sad and wond'ring eyes  
To see the approaching sacrifice.*

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
Your last and fiercest strife is nigh.  
The Father on his sapphire throne  
Awaits his own anointed Son.*

*Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
In lowly pomp ride on to die.  
Bow your meek head to mortal pain,  
Then take, O Christ, your pow'r and reign!*



Monday, April 6, 2009  
**Rodney's Finger**  
Text: 2 Corinthians 4:7-14

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

*It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.*



The third grade students counted aloud on their fingers in English. Most of them did anyway. "Rodney, please count with us. Use your fingers. It helps you remember."

"He can't," said the children around him. "Can't" is a foul word in my classroom. I walked to Rodney's seat while still leading the entire class in counting. I took Rodney's hands in mine to help him along. He had been timid, often absent. I was primed to impart some can-do attitude.

Rodney obediently lifted one finger after another. Then I saw the "can't." His left middle finger was half gone. A swollen, though uninfected, stump remained, topped by fresh stitches.

I swallowed hard to keep my breakfast down. The class was counting still and I willed myself to join them. So did Rodney, working with what he had. It's what Haitians do.



Tuesday, April 7, 2009

## **Thick of Battle**

Text: Ephesians 6:10-18

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*



How do we curb misbehavior in a society when, in fact, we're opposing the legions of hell? Haitians struggle with this question when trying to discern causes of their national chaos and poverty. To many, Haiti is a God-forsaken place where evil reigns. Yet, in my personal experience, I have known inspiring examples of Christian faith and hope. These do not exist without God's presence and action. Therefore, he is most certainly at work in this place. Could it be, in fact, that God is most fully present where the battle rages fiercest, where the wrong seems strongest? On an intellectual level, I believe that to be probable. I have little desire to probe the thick of such battle, though, on a practical level. Or do I? Is that not exactly what intercessory prayer is? Is not the Ephesians 6 call to battle readiness for every believer? It's basic Christianity, not super-hero work at all.

The Matthew 25 story of the sheep and the goats alerts us that we're closest to Jesus when we serve those in need. Are we likewise in the deepest experience of God's active power when we refuse to pull back from the places where evil rages? Does that mean Haiti is not God-forsaken at all? But quite the opposite? Is it the place where the hosts of heaven hover closest to earth? How do I learn the answer to that when the fight is not with flesh and blood but powers and principalities? Maybe the people who pray most understand best. When I pray more aggressively, I will likely understand better how it works.

Wednesday, April 8, 2009  
**Pricey Veggies**  
Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:5-14

*May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*



"The price of vegetables is outrageous!" Monique complained. She, a fellow teacher, was returning from the Saturday market as I was headed that direction. We rarely see each other in our "civvies."

"Well, everything is more expensive now, isn't it?"

"I know," she answered, "but it's the vegetable prices that really get to me. My father used to grow mililton, squash, carrots, you name it. We had all the vegetables we wanted at home."

"Did you lose that garden land?" I wondered.

"No." Her beautiful face wrinkled with the annoying memory. "When Aristide opened the border with the DR, Haitians no longer wanted their own local produce. They all thought anything Dominican was better. My father couldn't sell his vegetables anymore."

"Wow, that's tough. But why not raise them at least for your family?"

She smiled sheepishly. "We kids didn't want them either." She glanced at her shopping bag. "Now I pay ridiculous prices for Dominican produce."

"It's not too late. Your family could still garden again."

Monique rolled her eyes. "My father's too old for that now. And I'm too busy teaching."

I didn't believe her but I valued our friendship too much to counter her. "It's too bad," I said instead. "With a little seed and some time weeding, you could have had your own fresh vegetables."

I had to plant the seed of an idea before we parted. There's a steady flow of fatalism that runs through Haitian culture, smothering individual initiative.

Maundy Thursday, April 9, 2009

**Pare de Sufrir**

Text: Mark 8:31-38

*He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*

*But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”*

*Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”*



We took the first taxi we saw at the Santiago airport. Too bad his shocks were shot. Every pothole jarred us but, at least, he didn’t blast mariachi music on his radio. We were zipping across town heading toward Dajabon and thus the Haitian border when I noticed the freshly painted stucco of a church. In large letters, the side wall read: PARE DE SUFRIR. I spent much of the remainder of the trip pondering this. Prepare for suffering. How many churches make signs like that? Is there a whole community of people getting pumped about taking up their cross and following Jesus? Then I saw a stop sign: PARE. Oh, no, I had been reading Spanish and thinking Creole. “Pare” in Creole means “prepare.” The Santiago church was actually proclaiming: Stop suffering.

I explained my polyglot confusion to Dave. “Well, Jesus calls us to stop suffering too.” In repentance, we can stop our own suffering due to our sinful choices. In outreach, we can work to stop the suffering of others. But, in discipleship training, we prepare for suffering. We determine to embrace hardship, if, in so doing, God’s purposes are best served.

Good Friday, April 10, 2009

**No Bible, No Seat**

Text: Acts 15:5-11

*Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."*

*The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."*



Michaëlle pouted. Saika moaned. But neither received pity.

"No Bible, no seat." Pastor Dave repeated the rule to the two eleventh grade girls, who had already stood beside their desks for the better part of the Bible class hour. He continued teaching on the Acts 15 passage, emphasizing that grace, not the law, saves us.

Jerry, on the opposite side of the room, began digging through his backpack and found a tiny New Testament. Could he loan it to Michaëlle so she could sit?

"Of course," said Dave. "By grace she can sit. It's Jerry's gift that saves her from standing anymore." Then poor Saika was really grieved to be without a Bible. "The only way Saika can sit is if someone gives her a Bible. She did not bring hers. She deserves to stand because she broke the rule."

Dave watched her classmates squirm. Would no one stand in her place? Finally, Doudy, a short quiet boy in the back row, stood. He walked to Saika and handed her his Bible.

With a dramatic thank-you, she melted into her seat. Doudy returned to his desk and stood beside it. The room is quiet. "Grace is costly," Dave said. "It's free to us but it costs the giver because the law must be kept."

Saturday, April 11, 2009

## Muddy Market

Text: Hebrews 12:7-13

*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.*



After sliding through the mud slimed market paths, I felt triumphant to finally find some decent grapefruit. The seller was plopping them into my shoulder bag when a teenage boy beside me said, "Your feet are all muddy."

"Well, so are yours," I fired back.

"I could carry you on my back and then you wouldn't have to walk through the mud." The last time I'd accepted such a service (about two years ago) I'd decided it would be the last. This guy was forty years younger than the last and had teeth. Still I wasn't biting.

"No, thanks," I said, "It's very slippery today. We'd both end up falling in the mud."

"Well, if I had a motorcycle, I would take you wherever you wanted to go."

"That would be nice. Maybe someday." I smiled as I left with the mud squishing inside my plastic shoes.

"Where are your boots?" called an older woman, standing in for my mother.

"I don't have any!" I yelled back, not stopping.

The two-week old cement sidewalk was mud-coated to match the day's market décor, as were everyone's feet and ankles. Mine were the most noted, however, since my pale legs provided the best contrast to the dark mud splatters. I inspired hoots and laughter at every turn. So I shrugged and laughed too. "Mwen blije. I have no choice but do it." A well-worn Haitian one-liner for unpleasant duties. That usually quieted the jeering into calmer acceptance of our joint fate.

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009  
HE IS RISEN!  
HE IS RISEN INDEED!

### **Jesus Christ is Risen Today**

*Jesus Christ is ris'n today, Alleluia!  
Our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!  
Who did once upon the cross, Alleluia!  
Suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!*

*Hymns of praise then let us sing, Alleluia!  
Unto Christ our heav'nly king, Alleluia!  
Who endured the cross and grave, Alleluia!  
Sinners to redeem and save, Alleluia!*

*But the pains which he endured, Alleluia!  
Our salvation have procured; Alleluia!  
Now above the sky he's king, Alleluia!  
Where the angels ever sing, Alleluia!*

*Sing we to our God above, Alleluia!  
Praise eternal as his love; Alleluia!  
Praise him, all you heav'nly host, Alleluia!  
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Alleluia*



Monday, April 13, 2009

## Is It Worth It?

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."*

*Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*



On a good day (i.e. enough sleep, minimal class discipline problems, the right hormonal balance, no macaroni over rice for lunch), I'm very upbeat. However, on gloomy days (think: waking to preachers in the town square at 2 am, smart-mouthed tenth grade girls, too many weeks since I've seen my kids, lesson plans flopping), I wonder: Is it worth it?

To be in Ouanaminthe, Dave and I make personal sacrifices and UALC makes a financial sacrifice. In return, a Christian school in northeast Haiti gets improvements in its accounting system, English instruction, Bible courses and a more intimate contact with U.S. supporters. UALC, as our sole sending community, risks ministry involvement in the poorest nation in our hemisphere with possibly the most corrupt government worldwide. Are we crazy? Yes, fools, in fact, for Christ's sake.

We don't know where this endeavor will end up. In what way will poverty be reduced or faith strengthened? We don't know. At times, I even wonder if the greatest change will not be in Ouanaminthe but in Columbus. What if God tells rich followers to care for the poor in order to rescue and renew the rich? Given the maturity of faith and hope of Haitian believers, I can imagine God seeing our involvement backwards from the way we do. Whatever God's plan, we press on by faith, humbled by God's desire to use us, however weak and inept. We are the very stuff with which God works best. As sinners in a fallen world, we are precisely Christ's objective on the cross.

Here we are, Lord. Send us.



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