

# HAITI SUNDAY | SERMON

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Proverbs 31:10-31 • Mark 9:30-37 • The Rev. Catherine Healy • Pentecost 17B • September 19, 2021

I looked at the Scripture readings for today and got all excited about preaching on the merits of a capable wife, but then I remembered that it was Haiti Sunday. So I decided to look at the recent news about Haiti, instead.

"Floods. Hunger. Violence."

"Need Is Overwhelming."

"Fights Over Food Distribution."

"Cycle of Mismanaged Aid."<sup>1</sup>

Most of us will never get the chance to travel to every country in the world, so this is how we form our picture of what life is like in other places: by reading the news. And if you were to rely on headlines for your mental picture of Haiti, you could be forgiven for thinking that Haiti is defined by natural disasters, political turmoil, and poverty. In short, a nation defined by its tragedies. When we open the paper, that's the only picture we see.

But through St. Paul & the Redeemer's longtime friendship with Episcopal church communities in Haiti, and our eight-year partnership with St. Patrick's Church & School in Tom Gateau, we have the opportunity to form a very different picture—one that it's much harder to see from reading the news.

It's true that natural disasters, political turmoil, and poverty are part of Haiti's present reality and dominate the story of its past. But no nation is defined by its tragedies. Nations are defined by their people. And in Haiti, people are doing what people do everywhere—trying to make a living, caring for their elders, gossiping about their neighbors, and worrying about how to give the best possible chance to their kids.

In Haiti, like everywhere else, there is plenty of ordinary greatness: Women *and* men excelling at all the daily tasks we hear about in Proverbs 31. But if you've ever started your own business, or woken up before dawn to cook for your family, you know that these things may be *ordinary*, but they're not *easy*.

They are particularly difficult in the Haitian context, where the legacies of slavery and colonialism *have* created poverty and political turmoil, and made it impossible to respond effectively to natural disasters. It's hard to start a business in a place where supply chains are forever disrupted and nobody has any money to invest in your plan or purchase your wares. It's hard to make food for your family when food is scarce. But that doesn't mean that Haitians lack resourcefulness. It only means that Haiti lacks resources—or, more accurately, that

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<sup>1</sup> These are all real *New York Times* headlines from recent weeks: <https://www.nytimes.com/topic/destination/haiti>

centuries of exploitation have funneled its resources elsewhere.

This resource scarcity is a big problem. But it's a solvable one. And from the beginning, SPR's partnership with St. Patrick's has sought to identify solvable problems our churches can work on together. SPR provides the fundraising support; St. Patrick's provides the knowledge to direct funds where they are needed most. Importantly, both of our churches provide the people. I'm always amazed at how regularly the leaders of our Haiti ministry are in conversation with the leaders at St. Patrick's. The back-and-forth flow of ideas is constant.

Between our churches, one consistently shared priority is investing in Tom Gateau's children. The students at St. Patrick's School are getting an excellent education; thanks to the support of SPR, they can also rely on a nutritious school lunch several days a week—for many students, school lunches are the *only* meals they can rely on. They can trust that their teachers will be there in the classroom, because their teachers are getting paid. And they have the opportunity to study music and play in the school band. Maybe a small handful of them will go on to become great musicians, just like a small handful of kids from any school band in the U.S. But the goal is to help build a future where they, and every child, can live lives of ordinary greatness.

I don't care whether my own child becomes a professional musician; I do hope that she will love music. I don't care whether she ever gets rich; I do hope she'll be able to support her family. And the

same hopes I have for her, I have for the children of Tom Gateau.

In the Gospel reading we hear today, Jesus tells his disciples, "Whoever welcomes one child in my name welcomes me." It's a sweet image, Jesus holding a small child, but it's not meant to be cute. The theologian Debie Thomas writes about the radical quality of this gesture:

*Jesus doesn't say, "Welcome the child because it's a kind or loving or generous thing to do." He says: "Do you want to see what God looks like? Do you want to find God's stand-in, hidden here among you? Are you curious about the truest nature of divine greatness? Then welcome the child. Welcome the child, and you welcome God."<sup>2</sup>*

This, ultimately, is the reason for our partnership with St. Patrick's. Not because Haiti is a tragic place that needs our help, but because we want to glimpse the presence of God everywhere we can. One of the most powerful ways we can do this is through welcoming the children of St. Patrick's—recognizing their humanity and believing they deserve all the chances at ordinary greatness that we hope to give the children of SPR. Circumstance has made their opportunities very different. But we can help to bridge that divide.

Like nations, churches are defined by their people. We are inextricably linked to the people of St. Patrick's, and I believe that God is using our mutual partnership for good in the world. I hope and pray that the differences of opportunity between us will shrink, and that this mutuality will only continue to grow.

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<sup>2</sup> Debie Thomas, "Who Is the Greatest?", *Journey with Jesus*, September 12, 2021.