

Exodus 17:1-7 and Philippians 2:1-13

Amazing to me that our Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ, chose the Caribbean as a focus for this World Communion Sunday, long before the hurricanes. I am sure they never expected that we would be looking at a Caribbean that has been so devastated... perhaps some larger wisdom knew this region of the world would need our prayers at this time. Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are part of this arc of more than 700 islands just south of Florida. They are our neighbors. Many are Christians praying in a part of the world that is torn apart by storms, and we stand with them today.

Our own David Specht, Clare's husband, is working with FEMA and is in Texas supporting those who are at the front lines of hurricane recovery right now. I e-mailed him yesterday and he replied that he is well but his days and nights are full as he supports FEMA workers at a branch office in Corpus Christie, also in a responder camp that consists of 3 men's tents and 2 women's tents each with 180 cots...and this is where David has been living. He also supports 90 FEMA workers living on the USS Lexington, anchored in Corpus. He counsels and supports those who go door to door offering assistance. Davie writes, "*It will take a long, long time for the people in these communities to put their individuals and shared lives back together.*"

He says they are understaffed because of the multiple disasters in Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico...and some of the colleagues with whom David works are from Puerto Rico and are themselves so worried about their own homes and families.

And so we pray, today, not just for all the people struggling in these communities but for those who are there in helping capacities, including David Specht.

Let us be in prayer: Uniting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

First, let's see how the scriptures of today's lectionary readings relate to this world. I was surprised how they spoke to me this week. You heard the story of the Israelites who are now in the midst of their exodus, journeying away from slavery in Egypt to a promised land...and yet they find themselves in a desert with no water to drink. They get what a friend of mine calls, "Hangry"...Perhaps you know this word? It describes a feeling of being both hungry and angry. Hangry.

The Israelites blame Moses and question whether this move towards freedom is going to kill them! Then they ask a big theological question, "Is God really among us or not?" I can only imagine that so many people who are now victims of hurricane damage, are asking the same thing. In their own thirst, in their waiting for hours and hours in lines for water and gasoline and food, they must surely be asking, "Where is God in all this?"

Moses asks God what he should do with these people whose anger is rising and God gives instructions. "Take some elders with you and with the same staff that you struck the Nile, strike a rock, and water will pour out."

Walter Brueggemann writes that the answer to whether God was with them or not, is YES! He says, "Like blood from a turnip, like a purse from the ear of a sow, water from rock, food from hunger, life from death, joy from sorrow, YES from NO, well-being from anxiety, God *was* with them." Perhaps in the same way the Spirit of God is with the millions of people in the plight of these recent storms, yearning for their well-being....and we all have been called to respond in action and the solidarity of prayer.

And I was struck, too, as I heard the opening words in Paul's letter to the Philippians, and thinking about our own efforts to help those in need...sometimes the words seem to be written just for us....

Hear Paul's words again: *If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy... be of the same mind... Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus....*

Paul's letter tells us how to care...with compassion and sympathy but without conceit...not placing ourselves above but in a way of reciprocity, holding us *all* within the love that was expressed in the Jesus Christ.

There are many ways to reach out...with our prayers, certainly, and our church has given \$500. to UCC Disaster Ministries and \$500. to Church World Service, as well as our 18 buckets with cleaning supplies...and we will be helping more through CROP WALK donations.... Although we are proud of these actions, we are reminded to stay humble...it is not about us, but about those who so desperately need our prayers and our compassion at this time. "In humility, regard others as better than yourselves" writes the Apostle Paul.

Through the UCC Justice and Peace action network, we can also send e-mails to our Congress requesting that they send aid through grants, not loans, that can help Puerto Rico for the long term. They say: *Three and a half million Puerto Ricans are without power, 40 percent without drinking water and only 11 of the 69 hospitals are in operation.*

There is a fear that with Columbus Day holiday coming up, the promise of aid will be stalled in Congress so they ask us to call them urging that this financial help will be expedited. If anyone else would like to take this action, just e-mail me and I will send you the link or you can call Congress.

In this shorter homily, I will close with a question about the title..."An Uneasy Peace." I was struck by this line in our Canticle from New Zealand where it says: "We come celebrating... the peace, that never lets us rest." I ask you to consider what this means to you....Does a Holy peace, never let you rest? What might that mean?

Maybe sometime I will preach a sermon it!

Amen...