

## God's Invasion

If you have any doubt about whether the kingdom of God is invading the earth, then look no further than the pews of St. Elizabeth's!

While it is often said that the most segregated meeting places on earth are a Sunday morning in church, what you are accomplishing here at St. Elizabeth's is a marvel to behold, what with people of so many different cultures, classes, colors and even creeds coming together to say thank you to the gracious God who pitches his tent among us.

It is a marvel to celebrate, especially this night, when the God of all creation makes his way into the womb of a teenage girl, choosing to come and live among us; to teach us, once and for all, what it means to be a human being.

Truth be told, until we meet Jesus, we have never met an actual human being.

Oh sure, we call ourselves human, especially when we mess up!

But we mess up because we are only **on our way to becoming** human — we groan, like an expectant mother, waiting to be born into the glory of true humanity, creatures created in the very image of God.

St. Paul sizes it up like this:

"We know that the whole creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth — right up to the present time.

[And we] ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as children of God, for the redemption of our bodies."

That we are still on the way is announced in every headline, from the despicable assassination of two police officers to the the senseless deaths of so many at the hands of over zealous officers; when it comes to our wars and rumors of wars, our hurts and slights of each other —we are on the way, but we are not yet home.

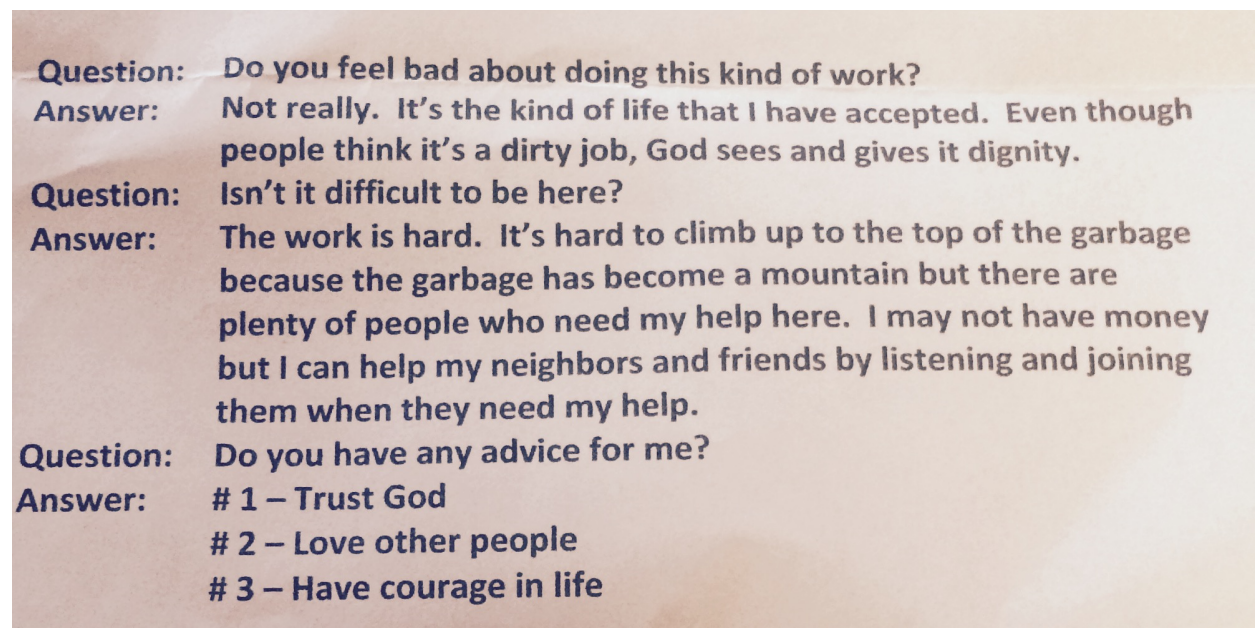
We are a people on the Way, and the journey can be so much more fun when we do it together, especially if we walk with those who are different from us, with those who see the world and life through lenses quite different from my own!

My cousin Ed, the one who preached here at my ordination, (who is, by the way, turning 108 next month!) sent me this Christmas card the other day.

It contains an interview with an elderly woman who makes a life scavenging at one of the largest garbage dumps in Manila.

The interview is brief.

It goes like this:



We can learn much from each other as we trudge this road of happy destiny.

We can learn that God is not who we think – and that humanity is not what we think either.

We come to this night and discover that in the midst of our imperfection – that God delights in “humans as we are, and God wants to involve us – even when we are cowards, even when we are murderers and liars and addicted to death, even when

we are slaves to security – even then – God longs to involve us in becoming something greater than we can ever imagine.” James Allison, paraphrased.

Fr. Vince Donovan lived among the Masai people in Tanzania for many years.

They are a cattle raising people who wander with their herds hundreds of miles each year.

They worship their ancestors and nature, and believe that this life is all there is for us; we live for a time, then perish forever.

Fr. Vince said this to them one Christmas night as they sat warming themselves around a blazing fire under a star lit sky:

“Human beings are not just like a fire sputtering for a few minutes, then fizzling out, darkness before and after.

Humanity is not the plaything of the universe, not a thing to be teased with happiness and crushed with sorrow, a thing without meaning among the many things of the earth.

**Humanity is God** appearing in the universe, appearing visibly in the midst of all he created.

That changes the meaning of humanity, doesn't it?

I can see you Masai shaking your heads and saying, 'No, people are not God! We know people, and they are filled with evil. They fight, kill, destroy, they do everything to separate others, and to separate themselves from one another.'

But Fr. Vince responds:

'I say to you Masai, you have not known a human being, you have never seen a human being.

Creation is not yet finished.

What you see is creation groaning even until now, yearning to be finished and complete, **to be the body of God.**

But suppose the fullness of time arrived and by the work of God there appeared a man who was perfectly human, according to the plan of God.

If there was such a man, then there would be no other way to describe him than to say: **this man is God – God appearing in the universe.**

Jesus is that man; and perhaps the most surprising thing that Jesus did is to show us not only who God is, but to show us who humanity is also.”

V. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 57. (paraphrased).

And that is what brings us here tonight.

Whether you occupy these pews every Sunday, or whether you occupy these pews only once or twice a year, whether you are here as a reluctant guest or as a hopeful believer, there is one thing that connects all of us to one another.

No matter your circumstances, no matter your pain, no matter your success, your true identity is that of a child of God.

And even more, you are a beloved child of God.

Beloved by the child that God himself becomes.

Beloved by the God who knows every form of human difficulty, and who promises NOT to rescue us from danger, but to be with us in the midst of every danger.

This holy night, as we celebrate God becoming one of us, please remember that you are made in the image of God.

“If we could really see with the eyes of the soul, we would see angels going before every person we pass, saying: “Make way for the image of God! Make way for the image of God!” Long, *Testimony*, 46.

This night, God says to the whole world, to you and to me, to the Masai and to that sainted lady scraping a living out of a garbage heap, from President Obama to

President Putin, from Donald Trump to Lindsey Lohan, God says to the whole world this night: "You are accepted."

You are accepted by that which is greater than you, the name of which you do not know.

Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later.

Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much.

Do not seek for anything; do not intend anything.

Simply accept the fact that you are accepted." Tillich.

In this child, through the grace of God, all of humanity is home free.

The groaning of creation will one day find its new birth, "a hugely delicate project, worked out over a vast expanse of time, and suggesting, not the power of one who puts things right, but the greater power of one who loves us into being and for whom time is not a concern." James Allison.

This night, the desert blooms, the virgin gives birth, and you, my friends, are accepted.

May you wake each morning holding fast to this truth.

+amen