

Lent II – Sunday March 20

The Episcopal Church, St. Etienne's and A Wise Old Man's Dream

Scripture: Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17 (NRSV)

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions.

Do you remember what we talked about last week? We talked about Haiti and how the trees were cut down and how the people of Haiti needed help to replant trees. Why do you think it is important for trees to grow in Haiti?

Today we are going to talk about a priest who went came who came to the United States almost 150 years ago and taught us about Haiti. Let's listen to his story.



James Theodore Holly

Almost 150 years ago the Episcopal Church first came from the United States to Haiti. A black African priest, The Rev. James Theodore Holly, got angry with the church and government in the United States because he felt that not enough was being done to end slavery. **Do you know what slavery is?**

Rev. Holly wanted to do something, so, he left his home and his church in New Haven, Connecticut with 300 members of his congregation - St. Luke's - and sailed for Haiti, where the black African slaves had freed themselves sixty years before. One church, Bon Berger (Good Shepherd) was started in a valley near Leogane in 1867. Later the people moved to a mountaintop and named their church St. Etienne's. Here in Maryland we would call the church St. Stephen's.



The people of St. Etienne's outside the church

The people build houses and a town. They named the town St. Etienne's, the same as the church. St. Etienne's is located south of Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti.



Haiti and St. Etienne's

Thirty years ago the Senior Warden of St. Etienne's was a wise old man named Justin. Justin had grown up in the mountains. When he was a young man he worked in the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Finally he came home to the mountains he loved to live and raise his family. His church was very important to him. He had many friends. He was a great leader in his church and in his community.

Near the end of his life he also had many new friends who visited from Episcopal churches in the United States. He often told them about the mountains he remembered from his boyhood - mountains that still had trees covering them. He spoke of the songs of the birds that rested and nested in the branches of the trees. He spoke of great trees whose roots held open the earth for springs of water to flow.

As an old man, he dreamed that one day again there would be trees on the hillsides around St. Etienne's. He dreamed that one day again the people would have enough food and shade. The birds would have a home. The soil would not wash down the mountain and into the sea. The water from deep within the mountain would find a pathway next to the roots of the trees to the surface of the earth.



What Justin saw - only a few trees on the mountains

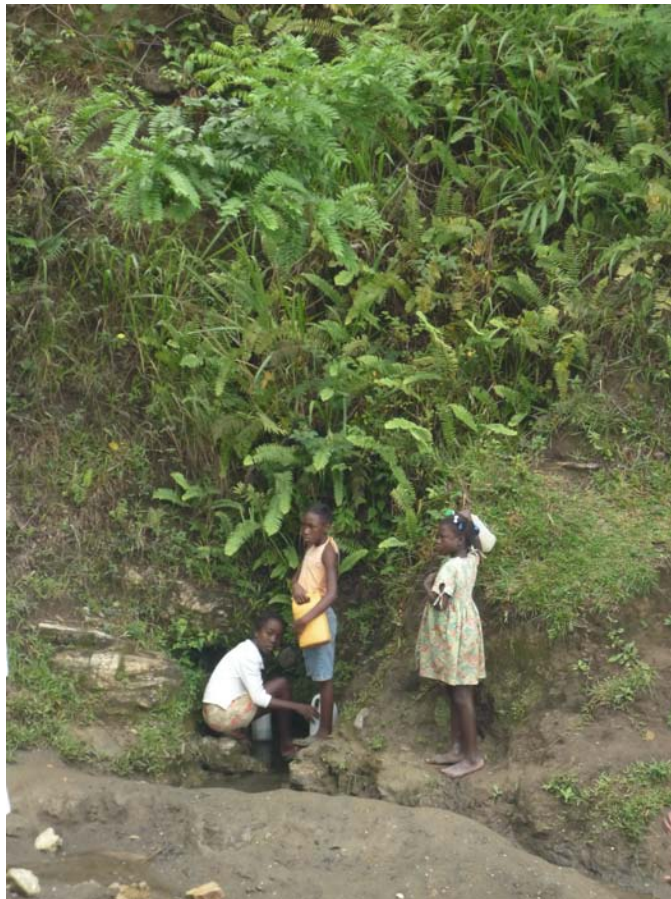
Because Justin shared his dreams with all his friends and his congregation, together they decided to help his dream come true. The Episcopal Churches in the United States began to raise some money to buy trees. Ten people from St. Etienne's agreed to learn how to grow tree saplings from seeds in sacks and create tree nurseries. The Haitians call their tree nurseries - in Creole – Pepinye.

Do you know what a sapling is?



Tree saplings in sacks ready to plant

They bought little sacks and put dirt in them. When they had the money they added fertilizer. They looked and looked for seeds from the few trees around where they lived and bought some seeds in the market place and planted the seeds in the sacks.



Children at a pepinye

The plants needed water to grow so they set up Pepinye, do you remember what that word means? They planted their Pepinye near streams and springs.

Why do you think they would plant these little plants near the streams and springs? If they could not find a stream or spring they built cisterns (big barrels) to catch the the rainwater from the roofs of their homes to water the saplings in the Pepinye. That way they could have Pepinye near their houses. The first trees which they produced were given to members of the community. All this took four years.



Trees by a stream

During that time, in 1992 – 500 years after Christopher Columbus had first landed in Haiti, the wise old man, Justin, the Senior Warden, died. There were so many people who came to his funeral to celebrate his life that the procession of his coffin to the grave near his home stretched for miles.



Justin's funeral procession

When Justin died, his dream did not die with him. And his friends decided to help make Justin's dream come true. He had seen the beginning of his dream become a reality with the Pepinye.

Justin knew trees on the mountains would make St. Etienne a better place.

Do you think it was a good dream to help the people of Haiti get trees?

What would Annapolis be like if it did not have trees?

We will continue our story next week.

Prayer: O Jesus, you came to earth as one of us to be our friend. Pour out your Spirit upon us as we dream, give us visions of a better world, teach us how to be friends with each other and to share each others' dreams so that together we may accomplish more that we could by ourselves. All this we ask in your name. Amen.