

A Sermon for Epiphany 7, Year B
February 19, 2006 – Mark 2:1–12
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Episcopal Relief and Development

Good Morning. I am your Episcopal Relief and Development Diocesan coordinator for the Diocese of Kansas. Debbie Fowler is the parish coordinator at St. Luke's. Thank you Debbie and Father Cook for inviting me to be here this morning.

I love stories ... to read, to tell. Today, our gospel is a story of a man with nothing, helped by friends, and healed by Jesus. We have few details. I wonder who the friends were, or who the paralytic was, or what happened later? It is difficult for me to tell stories without providing more details than Mark. I want to tell you what your church, the Episcopal Church of America, is doing for people in need of help. Just as the coins in your pocket have two sides so does ERD. On one side, we stand ready to help in case of disaster, and we come at the request of any bishop of the Anglican Communion. On the other side of ERD, we are helping communities and individuals escape the continuing cycle of poverty. We call it promoting sustainability. You have heard about the Tsunami and Katrina ... ERD is still there working to help Southeast Asian return to a productive lifestyle, and Southeast America to a life as they knew it before Katrina.

This morning I want to talk to you about sustainability. It is this side of ERD that won my loyalty. ERD does not just provide food for the poverty stricken – ERD comes to a community, helps the member decide how best to meet their needs, and then provide the education and money to allow the community to work together towards a better future. We do not tell communities what they need to do – communities must want to make changes – ERD empowers those changes. Because no organization can be everything to every community, ERD focuses on food security programs to ensure families have the means to access and secure healthy food sources, and primary health care programs that help children and families live healthier lives.

Since I could stand up here and talk longer than your anatomies care to listen, I will tell you three stories ... stories like the one we heard in the gospel this morning.

First, I want to tell you about twenty-three year old Mercy, who lives with her two year old son Johannes, in the community of Chibuluma. Johannes is the youngest of three children, and Mercy believes she may be pregnant again. Mercy has brought him to the Chibuluma clinic because she suspects his high fever may be a sign of malaria. This will be his second bout of malaria in his two years of life. Fortunately, the Chibuluma clinic is equipped with a laboratory where he is able to have his blood drawn and diagnosed. Johannes is diagnosed with malaria and is prescribed Coartem, a drug effective in treating non-resistant strains of the disease. Health workers give Mercy an insecticide-treated net and show her how to use it properly. Pregnant women and children under five are the most vulnerable to the disease; so she and her children are at an increased risk. Mercy is taught to recognize malaria symptoms, shown how to administer the medicine, and instructed in how to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in or near her home. The

community malaria action team will follow up with her and make sure she and the children are sleeping under the insecticide-treated net.

The World Health Organization estimates that there are more than 300 million cases of Malaria each year, and 90% of those occur in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is estimated that 3000 children under the age of five are dying daily. Malaria is the leading cause of death worldwide. It is spread by a mosquito that bites primarily between midnight and 4am. Where are most children under 5 at that time? Asleep. The problem? How do we keep mosquitoes away from sleeping children? ERD is distributing insecticide-treated nets, supplying effective drug therapy and educating families on malaria prevention. We don't just pass out nets to people standing in lines...we TRAIN community health workers to teach prevention to families.

Now hop in your comfy plane and fly south to Cape Town, Africa. Unlike the area we just left, this area has vast natural resources, yet half of the people live in poverty. Naomi, like many living in poverty, is a single mother, and possibly HIV positive. She is attracted to a soup kitchen where she can get a meal for herself and children. After lunch she sits with other mothers and talks about the lack of work. An aid worker overhearing their conversation asks them about themselves and what kind of work they can do. She determines that most of the women can sew, and asks if she can teach them to make a quilt. The worker is a hard taskmaster, and many stitches are ripped out before the quilt is finished. The quilt is sold to a shop in Cape Town, and the money is used to purchase more fabric. ERD supplies money for sewing machines ... a cottage industry is born. The only rule – to participate all school-age children must attend school. Today these quilts have been sold in London and to a hotel chain in Cape Town. Not only have these women kept their children in school, they have learned mathematics, reading, accounting, budgeting, and economics. But most of all their children will begin to break the cycle of poverty because they have attended school.

Now hop onto your plane one more time; this time we fly to Central America, El Salvador. El Salvador is no stranger to heartache. The prolonged civil war in the 1980s left thousands with physical and emotional scars. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch killed hundreds and destroyed half of the nation's crops. Today, almost 50% of the population lives in poverty. In early 2001, two major earthquakes, and ten thousand aftershocks, destroyed 25% of the country's housing. Picture yourself as the father of 3 daughters, no work, depressed. Mario used to be comfortable when he worked for a government official no longer in power. Now he cannot find work, he is no longer a community leader. ERD was working in his community when a worker met Mario. He had no interest in the presence of ERD. After much coaxing he decided to accept the 10 hens and two roosters that were offered him. Actually he was offered more than chickens; he was taught how to vaccinate them (chicken diseases run rampant in that part of the world), how to feed them, and how to build a pen for them. Mario could provide protein through eggs for his family. Months later the community worker that had provided the chickens returned to visit Mario. Mario proudly showed the worker his new 'chicken condo'. He has a house for layers, one for chicks, and one for future meat. Behind his 'condo' he had cleared more land, covered it with his 'ready-made' fertilizer, and he was growing tomatoes ... enough to eat, and many to sell. At last he had hope

for his children ... a real future ... education for his children. Besides that he was teaching others in the community to raise chickens. He was once again a community leader.

My dedication to Episcopal Relief and Development is based on stories like these. I really want people to learn to make their lives better.

In today's gospel, we heard the story of a man unable to do anything but lie in bed. He had no future. His friends went to great lengths to help him. When the crowd was too great for them to push through, they brainstormed another possibility ... climbed on the roof and took off the tiles. Today, as ERD looks at world problems, they look at the plight of children. They want to become as the friends of the paralytic in today's story. They work to find a way to change the future of those children through work and prayer. Today, you at St Luke's, and all Episcopalians are like those carrying the paralytic's bed ... you make ERD's work possible.