

**The Unbroken:** Meetings last week with the Haitian Methodist Leadership and GBGM and UMCOR graced us early with the Circuit officers and Pastor Ralph. He's visiting "to inventory projects due to indebtedness and loss of support until some adjustments are made," he explained.

He expressed hope we would both address issues of ethics in our presentations at the youth rally today. The Haitian ethic and management of programs are a great frustration for him, he said.

Joe had been asked to speak on "Financial Responsibility & Community Development" and I chose Romans 12:1-2b to discuss Paul's theology and his ethics. Understanding the great mercies of God and living all of life as sacrificial gratitude seemed easy enough. Ethics were a focus for both presentations, and when Pastor Ralph suggested youth might react negatively we took it lightly.

Joe asked youth to identify qualities of a good leader and they agreed, leaders must have a good representation, but could not suggest how one was to get that "good reputation." Many suggested good leaders "feel good about themselves" then scoffed when honesty and integrity were offered as good qualities. Those are to be admired in oneself not in others. I chalked it up to semantics and began my presentation.

Immediately I was in hot water for suggesting some practical but scholarly background for Paul's writings. Paul would not collect money for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, nor had he or Jesus experienced, as good Jews, sacrificial offerings in a Hebrew temple. A merciful God was okay, but, Paul's mission was in no way about "other people," it was all about Jesus.

We should have listened to Pastor Ralph.

Part of me wants always to defend the oppressed, hungry poor of Haiti. I often make excuses or advocate for rude and ruthless behavior and obvious deviousness in business and finances. When "the circle has been unbroken" for hundreds of years I find it hard to do the tough love thing. It's difficult to demand a certain ethical standard from those with "damn good excuses."

We are here, not to perpetuate dependency nor criticize or judge, yet, expecting an ethical standard set by Paul long ago does seem critical to progress. The ethic of "other" for those who know only self-protection, threatens the self esteem of unidentifiable "good reputations."

If rudeness is a choice then also is honesty and integrity. A change in "ethic" may be what breaks the cycle of poverty and I may not excuse deceptive behavior, tomorrow, or Tuesdays.

Pastor Shirley, La Gonave, July 17, 2008