

**Daily Life in Ouanaminthe---Pinning Hopes on Jesus, With Exodus 14:14 Courage
January 3, 2012, By: Pam Mann**

Even though I've been a slacker on my cardio and strength training goals in the first days of 2012, I did work through a new yoga app before bed last night. The calm male voice said to breathe deeply and "delight in the day you've been given." The first time I heard that phrase I thought the secular world is going to outstrip believers in calling people to joyful gratitude, if we're not diligent. I do delight in this day and I know Whom to thank for it. I'm pinning my hopes for it on Jesus Christ, as I was exhorted to do in Brodie Taphorn's New Year's Eve sermon at the Mill Run Jazz service [click [here](#)]. Brodie told an entertaining tale of his childhood hope to be the macho hero for a certain girl and urged us to set our sights higher when we pin our hopes. I sat there as an English teacher pondering the linguistic origin of the expression "pinning hopes on something." Later, in an Internet search, I learned that the expression possibly has its roots in a fourteenth century military practice of soldiers pinning their leader's insignia on their sleeve before going into battle. Given that during the New Year's Eve service we had sung a jazzed version of "Stand, Stand Up for Jesus, You Soldiers of the Cross," I found this military image striking a chord in my spirit. My personal approach to each morning involves centering on preparation for spiritual battle. In Ouanaminthe, folks are keenly aware of spiritual forces. Perhaps being an international border town increases awareness of powers and principalities. Maybe the prevalence of voodoo practice or sex trade heightens sensitivity to the reality of evil. Or, just as people with few restroom facilities or bedrooms have less opportunity to be physically modest, they also tend to be brutally frank about their own sinfulness.

In any case, each morning I declare war on sin, death and the power of the devil – down with the evil within us and outside us. We'll pin our hopes on Jesus (with Exodus 14:14 courage, a verse I regularly see scrawled on wheelbarrows in the market) and, in an ironic sense, He's pinning His hopes on us, His soldiers. We can enjoy the odyssey, savor the fellowship of His presence with us, our Emmanuel.

Now my brain is jumping to the memory of Eric Waters' sermon on New Year's Day morning [click [here](#)] just as my body is bouncing in the back seat of Juan's taxi on Dominican Highway #1. I caught Dave and myself on photo, though he was not too excited about the photo op (probably still grieving the Buckeyes with the rest of central Ohio). Eric's text was Luke 13:6-9, the parable of the fig tree. I am ready for honest work with the manure of my life, to cart off the dead wood and to identify the green wood and encourage it to grow. That attitude comes after two weeks' absence from dire poverty, eight hours of sound sleep, and a good breakfast. By God's grace, next week I'll still be ready for personal sacrifice and kingdom service.



5:00 p.m. (EST), Tuesday, January 3, 2012, Back in Ouanaminthe

We needed groceries so I headed to market. But I wasn't thinking just of stocking our dorm-size frig but also of getting photos, slice-of-life photos to enhance our update visually. No simple task where people recoil at being the object of a foreigner's photo frenzy.

So, counter to my usual prep for market, I tucked a small camera in my shoulder bag, with a prayer that I might manage its use without offense. As I turned onto Market Street, I saw the door ajar on the tiny wood house of an old woman who sells peanut butter. *I have to stop in*, I thought. Since a mid-November motorcycle crash, she's been bed-ridden, her fractured left leg in a full-length cast, her head a mass of stitches and her arms and shoulders scraped of skin. "It's only faith in God," she told me, sitting up in her bed for my visit. "Only faith that enables you to get in a car to go to a strange hospital after being crushed by a motorcycle. How long I have been here in this bed and only faith keeps me from despair. You know another woman was hit here about a week ago. Only her arm was broken, but she died the next day."

She spoke so softly while motorcycles passed her open door buzzing so loudly that I had to kneel down next to her bed to hear her. "Maybe internal bleeding." I said the words before I could stop my U.S.-style reaction. She didn't care why the woman had died.

As if she had heard my thoughts, she said, "Her death woke me up to my ingratitude. God spared my life and I have only complained since!"

Another woman, equally gray and equally stooped, stopped in to visit, too. As they chatted, I wondered how I could frame a request for a photo. *I can't*, I decided. How rude to photograph someone in their suffering. Besides, would color pixels capture the depth of this woman's faith or the kindness of her neighbor's encouragement? The camera stayed in my bag as I went on my way to market.

There a photo op found me. Wanting some vegetables for a simple supper, I turned the corner where I always go to buy plantains and squash. "Look at those tomatoes!" I said to Therèse, a feisty, short woman who often scolds wheelbarrow pushers blocking the path for her customers.



"Aren't they beautiful?" she said with unabashed smugness.

"I'll take 25 gourdes' worth and give me 25 gourdes of pigeon peas," I said. "I'll take that small cabbage too."



She loaded the produce into my bag and then added a summer squash and a small head of lettuce. "These," she said, "are your new year's gift."

Claudelle, the vendor next door, likewise, produced a large oblong winter squash for her new year's gift to me. *I have no gift for them*, I thought in frustration, as I smiled my thanks. Then I remembered my camera now pressed under the heavy squash. I dug for it. "I have a camera here if..." I began and then stalled. I couldn't ask. I looked at Therèse and then Claudelle.

"Oh, take our pictures!" said Therese, always ready to give orders. In an instant, she morphed from vendor to photo director. "Not there in the direct sun. Here. Make sure you get all the vegetables. Great color." She took a seat and struck a pose like she modeled for *Elle*. I took the photo like she said. Then it was Claudelle's turn. Though she sells mostly plantains and root vegetables, she chose to hold one of Therèse's cabbages for her photo. Passersby and women selling vegetables on the opposite side of the path studied the photo views on my camera. "They look just like themselves" was the frequent comment, as if the photos were caskets. Claudelle and Therèse were tickled to become the subject of positive market conversation. My new year's gift to them perhaps.

I live my life in two communities, quite different in language, race, culture and economy but profoundly similar in faith. As I was leaving the market today, I spied an unattended wheelbarrow, likely waiting to haul goods home for the night. Painted on its side, as US vehicles sport bumper stickers, were two words: *Christ capable* in French (though lacking the verb the way one would say in Creole: *Kris kapab*). Christ is able, meaning even when I can't, Christ can. I see disciples embodying that concept in both communities where I live. In one place, the disciples may work in carpeted buildings, while, in the other, they operate from makeshift shelters. But the same Christ instills faith and empowers without regard for cultural status. Like He's got His own kingdom. Yep, and may His kingdom come among us in 2012.

