

Sermon for Year B Lent 5
April 2, 2006
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock
The Reverend Jeanne Finan

Holy Dominoes

"Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks
(*Sarah and Mary Lois line up a few dominoes on the altar rail*)
They came to Philip, (*set up single domino*), who was from Bethsaida in Galilee,
and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'
Philip went and told Andrew (*set up another single domino*);
Then Andrew went and told Jesus (*set up another single domino*)..."

Dominoes.
Most of you, if not all of you, know this game.
If you don't know how to play dominoes,
you probably have at least seen dominoes.
It's quite a popular game in Panama—
often one of the activities that happens outside under the rancho in the
evenings
during our mission trips there.

Now you can find the word *Domino* in our Book of Common Prayer.
It is Latin referring to the Lord.

But that's really not how the game got its name.

The word "Domino" is actually French,
the name for a black and white hood worn by Christian priests in winter.
It's those colors—black and white--which must have inspired someone
to call dominoes—the game pieces—dominoes.

I want to share a little this morning about the mission trip 8 of us from this parish
just made to Panama.
Larry Boyer, Susie Morgan, Perry Mixter, Sarah Mixter,
Dale Shelton, Mary Lois Shelton, Diana White—and me!
For ten days we were missionaries with our friends in Panama.
Not TO our friends in Panama—
WITH our friends in Panama!

This was our third mission trip from St. Mary of the Hills;
Nineteen different people from this parish
have now personally gone
on these three trips to Panama.
But in a sense, I hope you understand, that ALL of you, ALL of us,
go on these trips.
Because we go representing the entire parish.

And many of you who cannot make the trip,
support us by coming to the Panama dinner, by giving donations for the trip,
and with your prayers.

We are all part of the mission work in Panama.

And Panama has become a part of all of us here at this parish.
Even if you have no desire to do international mission,
no interest in Panama,
Well, I'm sorry.
Your DNA has been altered with the rest of us
and we are ALL changed because of this deepening relationship
with our brothers and sisters in Christ in Panama.

That's because of the domino effect.

Look it up in the dictionary:

The domino effect is a cumulative effect produced when one event
initiates a succession of similar events.

There's also the domino theory:

the theory that if one act or event
is allowed to take place,
a series of similar acts or events will follow.

And that is, to me, the most beautiful thing of all that happens
as a result of our mission work with Panama: holy dominoes!

Let me just give you a few examples:

Our first year in Panama we painted the outside of the cabins at the camp.
And on the last day they asked us to paint the inside of two of the cabins.
And that was fine. We were willing.
Only the paint they bought—it was ON SALE—
The color was a shocking electric aquamarine.
But we dutifully painted.

Now last year when we went to Panama,
we learned to specify paint colors.
As you may remember, last year we painted 52,345 folding metal chairs.
(Well, maybe it was only a hundred some chairs!)
But we were able to transform rusty, steel grey chairs
With a little purple and orange and aqua and red paint.
Suddenly the dining room was so much more cheerful, more joyful.

Not only chairs did we paint.
We painted the dining room and the kitchen. First a fresh new base coat.
Then decorative painting.

Dale Shelton led the way as a tree—a spreading mango tree-- appeared on the wall.
Then everyone who worked that week (and a few visitors, too—
including Julio Murray the bishop) painted their hands and left their marks
on the archway from the dining room into the kitchen.

We stamped and stenciled butterflies and flowers--
And a dingy dining room became quite a delight.

So each year we have put a few of our "holy dominoes" into the line up in Panama.

This spring a visitor from the United States came to the camp and saw our work
And the holy dominoes began to fall in touch with one another.
She returned to the Diocese of Chicago

and brought back with her women from the Diocesan ECW.
And they repainted all the cabin interiors
And stamped and stenciled flowers and ferns and fish and ...
Well, goodbye electric aquamarine
And hello drop dead gorgeous cabins.

One of the Panamanians said to me,
The women of Chicago would never have come to work on the camp
if St. Mary of the Hills had not been here last year
and transformed our dining room.
Holy dominoes!

Last year when we visited the mountain village of Machuca
we discovered the women's coop that makes hats to help support their
families
had been displaced from their work area.
Most people in Machuca are sharecroppers and do not own their land.
So we took the Mission Committee's \$ 100 bill out of Tom Barrett's pocket,
and on the spot we purchased a small piece of land that we gave to those
women.
A holy domino set in place.

This year when we returned
That domino had fallen and the men had built a new rancho
and the women had a place to work as well as
a little mud-walled "gift shop" to sell their crafts.

But the domino effect happened in another way, too.
We bought a little piece of land in Machuca. Why not?
(Don't we wish we could buy a little piece of land in Blowing Rock for \$
100!?!)
So what happened?
The Episcopal Diocese of Panama bought another little piece of land.
Then a group of churches from the Diocese of North Carolina—
the central part of the state—went to Panama.
They went to Machuca and used their funds
and their labor, along with the labor of the people of Machuca,
to begin construction of a medical clinic for that community.
Holy dominoes all lining up.
What will happen next?!!

Backpacks are filled with school supplies.
A box of needed school supplies is delivered to the school near the camp.
What will happen next?

There are more stories than I can possibly tell you this morning.
Ask those who went to Panama.
Come to our dinner this summer to hear more, to see more,
to help support our mission in 2007.

We heard about the domino effect in John's gospel this morning.
In all the gospels really.
In all scripture.
One person does one thing.
And then another person does another thing.

And then another person does...

You get the picture..

Our prayers are holy dominoes, too. Our loud cries and our tears are holy dominoes. Each of us has the power to reach out in loving-kindness—

Not only in Panama of course—

Here in our own community, too.

Here in our own circles of family and friends.

A row of holy dominoes that just keep going and going,

Falling over with love and touching one another

(Sarah and Mary Lois tip over the first domino to make the whole line fall)

Now sometimes the domino effect does not release good energy into the world. Sometimes it releases havoc.

If we choose, as we heard in the reading from Jeremiah,

to break our covenant with God or with one another--

to cling to our domino and never let it join the parade,

to get fed up with all those dominoes ahead of us in line,

to jerk our domino out of the line up,

to push another domino off the table so we can grab the spot—

oh, we are all too capable of creating a domino effect that breaks hearts

and destroys lives—our own included.

We need to be so mindful of how

each of our actions sets off a chain of reactions—the domino effect.

Sometimes we are blessed to see what comes after us,

but often we really have not a clue.

Think of Philip and Andrew or Peter and James and John—

Think of Mary and Martha.

Do you think they had any idea what would happen

when they listened and took that **first** step to follow Jesus?

But Jesus called and they came.

And then 2000 years later,

here we are.

Holy dominoes.

Sometimes we cannot ask or imagine

what might happen from a small act of loving-kindness.

Like painting a dining room,

like buying and giving away a small piece of land.

Like fixing a meal for hospitality house.

Or working on a Habitat house on a Saturday morning.

Or volunteering with Oasis.

Or bringing in a can of soup for our Hunger Coalition basket.

Or putting a package of disposable diapers in your basket at Harris Teeter—

(Even when no one in your house has worn diapers for 25 years!)

So you can bring them to church and place them in our resource

basket

for foster families.

What might happen if we start
 showing up to pray the daily office
 Or serve as an acolyte
 Or set the altar
 Or teach Sunday School
 Or arrange the flowers
 Or welcome people at the door
 of the church...
 Or invite a friend to church.

All these things seem so ordinary.—yet they are not ordinary at all.
They are as un-ordinary as lining up a row of dominoes along the altar rail.
These things we do—worship, pray, serve, love—
These are our holy dominos.

Mary Lois and Sarah were two members of our mission team in Panama this year.
I've asked them to give you something this morning.
Put it in your pocket or in your purse
 or take it home for your desk or your kitchen counter.

Yes, it's a domino.
Your own personal holy domino.
It's up to you to choose what kind of domino effect
 you want to set off in the world.

Just remember today's gospel:
 First there were some Greeks who came to Philip...
 And then Philip went and told Andrew...
 And then Philip and Andrew went and told Jesus...

And Jesus answers them...

Those who love their life lose it...
 (We must be willing to surrender ourselves to love,
 to doing and being in ways
 that will not necessarily move us up the ladder
 of worldly success...)

And those who hate their life will keep it for eternal life...
 (Certainly, we can just lock our little domino away
 and never touch or be touched by anyone or anything).

Whoever serves me must follow me...
 We choose.
 We choose.

Holy dominoes!