

God is in the Details

Sermon notes for the sermon Given by Shikaorsor Ademu-John On African Thanksgiving Sunday, June 19, 2011

Prayer:

There is child crying this morning-no food to eat, no loving arms to embrace. There is a lactating mother that lacks the nutrients to feed her child, there is father feeling lost, helpless, lacking the access to fend for his family.

But what a friend we have in Jesus-all our pains and griefs to bear, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Lord you know our hearts and our minds. From you no secrets are hid. We come to you this morning with praise and thanksgiving, some- the fear of the unknown, anger, perplexing hope, and some the pain and agony of just not knowing. Lord you are the way, the truth and the light. O heavenly Father cleanse us, redeem us, guide us, heal us and protect us. Shape us Lord after your will. You are the Potter and we are clay. Rekindle in us a spirit of hope and reveal to us the solace of your embrace as we sit in your sanctuary waiting on your word- yielded and still. Come Lord, come Holy spirit come. Amen.

Sermon:

"There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountain top of our desires" (Nelson Mandela, nd.).

As I pondered on this statement in relation to Africa I am reminded of Africa's transition/struggle. The second largest continent three times the size of America. Africa is immensely rich in mineral sources, human resources and natural resources but yet torn within and outside of itself. Unfortunately Africa remains one of the poorest regions in the world despite its vast resources. Today amidst glimmers of hope and improvement the Continent displays political unrest, poverty, corruption, high rates of infant mortality, malnutrition and socio-economic inequality. Kofi Anan pointed out in a recent article that the recent progress that is evident in various African States where the widespread use of modern technologies supports businesses, increased communication lines, fair elections, and an increase in school enrollment rates- continue to go unnoticed (Annan, K., 2011) due to the vast abuse of power and corruption.

The imbalance of power within the region reminds me of the book by Father Law (An Episcopalian Priest) entitled -"The wolves shall dwell with the lambs" (Bible-Isaiah ch. 11 verse6). In short Father Law spoke of what is described as "The Peaceable realm". As Father Law stated and I quote-"This is the dynamic of living the Gospel". A balance

afforded in societies where the powerful and the powerless strike a balance and peacefully co-exist with each other despite their differences. In most African communities we see what Father Law calls "a high power distance economy" as opposed to the inverse which he calls "a low power distance economy" (Law, E., pg.22, 1993).

In a high power distance economy he explained there is no middle class. All the power is usurped and controlled by the few 1% of the population at the top of the economic scale owning all the wealth. This 1% in some cases 0.5% controls and dictates the structure and flow of the country's economy. The balance 99% or more constitutes the poor at the bottom of the economy whom most times go hungry without work, food, welfare or any political affiliation or voice. The establishment of a peaceable realm (i.e. living in God's word) in this environment is possible through the sharing of power by the powerful with the powerless – the Wolves and the lambs-the strong and the fragile.

As Father Law exegetes, living in the Gospel involves moving through the cycle of death and resurrection which means traveling through the spirituality of the cross and the spirituality of the empty tomb over and over again (Law, 1993). At the cross one realizes pain and suffering. At the empty tomb resurrection is eminent if faith and endurance were practiced at the cross.

Jesus our savior died at the cross and clearly demonstrated a willingness of letting go of power. In his powerless state Jesus combated evil (Law, 1993, pg.76) – The apostles creed tells us- **he was crucified, dead and buried.** But it goes on to say- **He rose from the dead on the third day ascended into Heaven and is seated on the right hand of God the father Almighty.**

With the power afforded him by God, Jesus could have at any given time destroyed his adversaries and perform miracles that could have spared him from being crucified on the cross. But by remaining powerless at the cross and choosing to obey his father-God (i.e. Faith and endurance while on the cross) Jesus combated evil and saved a world of believers. Powerless at the cross Jesus' focus was on faithfulness and obedience to his Father's word and through faith and endurance he gained empowerment as he passed through the empty tomb. We witness this as the Word comes alive in the flesh in Death and resurrection-Lent and Easter (Law, 1993).

The powerful are afraid of letting go. They are afraid to share their power because of the fear of becoming powerless and a perceived consequence of handing power over to the powerless whom they are afraid may in turn abuse this new founded power in a retaliatory manner. As father Law pointed out giving in to this fear only propagates injustices and allows evil to prosper (Law, 1993 pg. 76).

It is now some 50years today after Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's speech (The First President of Ghana) - "I speak of freedom" in 1961. Dr. Nkrumah's speech was a strong argument for a United Africa like The United States of America. Dr. Nkrumah then called for the natural and human resources of the Continent to be strategically organized and controlled by Africans for the good of the continent and the world – Of course this never happened. Today the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty and scarcity in

the midst of abundance as Dr. Nkrumah articulated (Nkrumah, 1961) continues to plague the Continent.

Africa's progress in the global/political arena is currently measured by a replacement of Colonialism with the newly recognized term of "enhanced trade partnerships" (Smith, 2005). In this new concept the playing field appears to be level and decisions are correlated by Africans and their International Investors. In my view Dr. Nkrumah's message and argument even though unrealized, still today holds strong tenets that are witnessed in the formation of bodies like the OAU (organization of African Unions) and the influence of such united forces continue to display on world powers like the G-8.

The colonization and control of Africa's wealth and economy by outside powers and its small powerful elite most feel left the continent in a dire state unable in most cases to effectively govern itself and establish a comprehensive control over its own resources. Independence that was perceived as the path to freedom has meant a dependence on foreign assistance and aid- "Scarcity in the midst of abundance, poverty amidst plenty" (Nkrumah, 1961).

Countless leaders armed with strategic plans and strong visions designed to counter this dependency of the continent on foreign aid, misguided leadership among African elite and the powerful have been maligned, mislabeled, ousted and disrupted through propaganda libel and slander. This collusion of forces against effective visionary solutions consequently result in political turmoil that is typified by tribes rising up against tribe, brother against brother, religion against religion, socio-economic/political imbalance and a continuous exodus of refugees in flight from the continent in search of peace.

Harboring past shortcomings and missed opportunities only serve to impede progress and stagnate growth. A continuum of this imbalanced share of power between the powerful and the powerless within and outside of the African continent will only always erupt in the recent domino effect and collapse of governments and economies witnessed (April 2011) in various regions.

In Sierra Leone we see the ongoing recovery from past wars and violence that left the country and most of its citizens physically and psychologically perplexed. Not to long ago we witnessed in Nigeria upheavals between Northerners and Southerners. Ethnic cleansing, religious indifferences and intolerance permeate The Sudan. Political upheavals in Coit de Voir. Turmoil in Senegal. The Egyptian uprising. Even in areas and Kingdoms where peace and calm were thought to thrive between rulers/elite and the people like Jordan and --- we see signs of socioeconomic and political unrest.

Amidst this bleak collage the Book of Daniel chapter 2 verse 22 reminds us "God reveals deep and dark secret things. He knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with him". There is no truth or consequence unknown to God. It is said that "Tribulation is a road to transformation". "Tribulation is a road to transformation" -I dare say that Africa in its present ordeal and seemingly oppressed state is on a road to transformation!!

Transformation is a change in appearance or character. A change that occurs on the inside and shows on the outside. The book of Romans states-"glory in tribulations, knowing

that tribulation produces perseverance: and perseverance, character; and character hope" According to Emily Dickinson- "hope is the thing with feathers that perches unto the soul". *"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus name "On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand" (Hymn, 368)*

As we struggle through challenges the immediate resolve is to GIVE UP, QUIT, and SPARE FURTHER HURT OR PARALYSIS OF UNRELENTING HOPE. Change is like giving birth- nine months of nurturing, eating right, exercising, breathing right, false triggers, trials and tribulations. Just when you think it's over the Doctors/clinicians yell- PUSH, PUSH, and PUSH. It is said that PUSH is an acronym for –"Pray until something happens". You go through the Lamars system - breathe and breathe tirelessly thinking WHEN, LORD WHEN? ANXIUOSLY WAITING TO EXHALE!!

The physicians say almost there-just one more PUSH!!!- Thank God for women right fathers? Finally a loud cry-the child is born- a new life is here. Its over, IS IT REALLY OVER? – No!!, At this juncture-the nurturing, caring, shaping and forming to independence is just beginning. *"Teach a child in the way that he or she should grow and they will never depart from it"* (Bible). Transformation is not an easy process. There are always impediments and challenges along the way. But we must never doubt or forget that God is all powerful and able.

Any situation or government where one human being or a consortium thereof knowingly and continuously deprives and suppresses others for his or their own gain only constitutes a sin. The Bible reminds us *"Where sin abounds God's grace abounds much more"*. *"Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed"*. Sometimes it takes great trials and tribulation for one to realize where our help lies. You pray yes, but calamity after calamity strikes. **WARS, FARMINE, FLOOD, DROUGHT, HARDSHIP, SUFFERRING**, - among an abundance of God given resources. The realization of these accounts begs for answers to the questions –**Why Africa? WHY ME? What is going on? Where is God in all this?**

God never left Africa. God never abandoned you. Jesus said "you will know that I am in my father and you in me and I in you" (Bible, John 14 verse 20). Do not be afraid be of good cheer. An article in the November 2010 edition of National Geographic Magazine depicts a 12 year old volunteer child soldier named Logocho in Southern Sudan (National Geographic, November 2010). Logocho fled his tribe in search for his calling among his peoples plight. Abandoning his father's traditions and the norms of cattle herding and comforts of his village Logocho took up arms against Soother Sudan's perceived enemy from the North. Logocho's journey led him to encounter an enemy soldier who he assisted with food and water unbekowning to his tribesmen. He was also introduced to the bible by a friend within his war camp-the WORD of our Lord- "Glimmer of hope". Getting to know the word of God amidst the war torn land Logocho came across the words of Isaiah- "Woe to the land shadowed with buzzing wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, that sendeth ambassadors by the sea" (Isaiah 18, vs1). Drawing reference to the surrounding destruction of war around him

Logochoko eventually elected to lay down his arms in realization of his calling in to God's ministry.

Around this same time an American Volunteer/human rights worker- (The head of the nonprofit US committee for refugees in Rwanda, Sudan and Ethiopia) happened upon a group of Christians praising God on a Sunday afternoon within the war torn region- coincidence? Or Divine interception? Touched by the message being preached- **"God's peace which passeth all understanding"** Roger Winter (an American philanthropist/sympathizer) offered his assistance to the congregants which he thought would have been requests for food, clothing or money.

Surprisingly the congregants asked for their leader to be able to access more religious training so that he can better serve the region. Roger excited and astonished by their request personally paid for the leader to go to school in a neighboring Kampala/Uganda on the simple request of a promise that he will return after seminary training. You see the gentleman's agreement between Roger and the young minister was to ensure that the minister did not flee or abandon his people while in the comfort and peace of neighboring Kampala or Kenya. 3 years later the leader returned in the person of Logochoko the child soldier now self re-named- Simon- "Where sin abounds God's grace abounds even more"

Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with [God];" "Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan" (Jos 4:9 NAS); "Samuel took a stone...set it up...and called [it]...Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us'" (1Sa 7:12 NKJV) In Psalm 22 David starts out saying: "God...I call to you...but you do not answer" (v. 2 NCV). But as soon as he starts remembering God's faithfulness he does a 180-degree turnaround and says, "Our ancestors trusted you...and you saved them. They called to you for help and...were not disappointed" (vv. 4-5 NCV). In this same way Logochoko returned to his people and built a ministry through God's word. Roger Winter the American philanthropist became a strong proponent, facilitator and co-Architect for the newly democratic state of Southern Sudan.

The Bible reminds us: "No test...that comes your way is beyond...what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God... [Will] always be there" (1Co 10:13 TM). Going back through Scripture and remembering the ups and downs of God's people and how He consistently came through for them, lends a fresh perspective to the African situation and enables us to see the Continent in a bigger picture-Transforming in God's grace (Daphne Kamara, 2011).

God has always been there. He was there in Babylon at the Tower of Babel- 652BC, He was there in Sierra Leone-two wars endless political turmoil, He was there in Nigeria-the Biafra war, He was there in Liberia, He was there in Ethiopia, He was there in South Africa-sent angels like Helen Suzman (a single woman parliamentarian in South Africa through apartheid), Steven Biko, Nelson Mandela-(leaned on his principles and faith in spite of the treachery that surrounded him and his family), Enoch Sontonga a Methodist school teacher in Johannesburg who wrote the song (Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica) the song we sing today written in 1897 etc... He was there in Egypt He is there with UMCOR serving and assisting numerous challenges through YOUR GIFTS and He continues to be there in the transformation of Africa.

God was there throughout colonial rule. As Africa enjoyed the heartening sigh of independence throughout most of the continent God continues to be in the details through its growth and transformation. As dictatorships fall we witness the spirituality of the empty tomb in Africa. The powerful are awakening to calls for shared relationships and partnerships with the powerless.

Recently in Egypt we witnessed as the people cried for reforms International powers and governments strategically answered the peoples cry. Global partners are awakening to the realization that a shared partnership promotes education, diplomacy, global stability, improved medical facilities and improved business platforms where ideas are exchanged and new frontiers are explored collaboratively and respectfully.

The book of Daniel Chapter 2 where the king's dream was interpreted Daniel foretold of a new kingdom where iron mixed with clay- as he interpreted- "***the strong mixed with the fragile***". Daniel said – "***they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another***" (***Daniel Ch. 2 verse 43***).

In a recent letter from our own Daphne Kamara (previous Lay Leader) who recently returned home to Liberia, as I read I saw glimmers of hope. Ms. Daphne is enjoying her stay in the comforts of her home within a politically stable Liberia from which she fled years ago. Numerous members from our congregation can attest to the growing socio-economic and political improvements in various states in Africa. **Change is not simple, swift or similar.**

Where is God in all this tribulation? Look deep. Look at the trials and tribulations. See and observe the signs of hope everywhere - God is in the details. Tribulation births perseverance. Perseverance begets hope. There is nothing He does not know. God is all able. Be not afraid - Be of good cheer. Amen

References:

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