

Leadership through Service

**A sermon given by Shika Ademu-John
Presented on Sunday, January 16, 2011**

Prayer:

Please pray with me. Lord, we ask for your presence here this morning. We pray that you come in and touch each and every one of us as we surrender our minds, our ears, our bodies. We pray that you may use us as instruments for your word. Move within us, move around us. Enter us and let your light so shine within us Lord this morning that we may be Christian soldiers for peace in your word. Have your way with us, Lord – you are the potter, we are clay – mold us, shape us make us after your will while we're waiting hungry, yielding and still.

Amen.

Sermon:

Mr. Wilson, thank you very much for that message because it so happens when Pastor had asked me to speak in his absence little did I realize it was Martin Luther King week. You mentioned Gandhi and Dr. King – with those names comes the words peace, sacrifice, leadership, service - two men that sacrificed a lot just to see peace among their people.

When I was asked by Pastor Young to speak in his absence I was at first surprised then apprehensive, overwhelmed, excited and most of all concerned. I was concerned whether I can meet the task. What will I say to you? In fact for a brief moment when he mentioned some other possible names I was quite relieved to be honest. When God calls we must take heed and offer our services without doubt, fear or apprehension. But like Aaron I questioned the task. I questioned my ability to deliver, only to be reminded in that same moment of the multiple

incidents in my life where God has been a powerful force in delivering all, not some, all of my needs.; not the once, but all of my needs. Psalm 35:18 says "I will give thee thanks in the great congregation. I will praise thee among much people."

How often do we get a chance to proclaim God's praises but for one reason or another we fall short because of some predisposition or apprehension. Most times we pray thanking God for his blessings but in silence not realizing that we are robbing those or some amongst us who are hungry; hungry for our witnesses of God's grace and mercy moving within our lives. Interestingly, the opposite is suggested in Psalm 40:10 which reads, "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving kindness and thy truth from the great congregation." I believe that in our fellowship as Christians it is so critical especially today when people are so vulnerable looking, searching, hungry for leadership through these difficult times.

Speaking of leadership reminds me of the movie some of you might have seen called "The President". Michael Douglas starred as the President. The President's leadership and morals were relentlessly questioned by his opponent because he was dating as a single father after his wife had passed and presumed to have neglected his responsibilities as a father not to mention the perceived degradation his acts were bringing to the office of the Presidency.

Urged by his advisors in the movie to respond to these accusations in light of plummeting polls attributed to the attacks from his opponent, the President refused to respond. As Michael Douglas' character as the President said that responding to his opponent's reckless and irresponsible remarks would only honor his comments. However the President's advisory team reminded him that in the absence of leadership people will listen to anyone who steps up to a microphone.

In this same way I believe as Christians our silence about God's blessings in our lives allows our brothers and sisters to be easily influenced and swayed by nonbelievers or those who are working contrary to the Gospel. It is said that all it takes for evil to win is good people failing to speak up and take action for what is right. Amidst the tragic incident we all probably witnessed last week in Tucson, Arizona last Saturday that shook our Nation again once more to its core. Pundits, politicians and citizens on the Left, Right and Center engaged in a national debate of blame, finger-pointing and political debates in search for a possible explanation or for responsible parties for the gunman's action - six dead, thirteen injured.

In that moment of civil discourse rose our President in the person of Barack Obama calming the rising tensions. As he stated it is essential in these times for us as a people to talk with each other in a way that heals not in a way that wounds. In offering direction and solutions forward The President pointed to the scriptures and referenced the adversities of Job, one of God's most faithful servants who was tried in every way possible and not once did Job doubt his faith in God — not once!

Leadership also resonated from the service of Dr. Michael Lemolethe, the Chief Neurosurgeon at UMC in Tucson, Arizona who in answering questions about the Congresswoman Gifford, he stated in spite of his gifts and leadership as Chief Neurosurgeon of UMC Hospital, he said in times like this within the medical profession, doctors and nurses serving the patients like to think that they are solely responsible for the progress of their patients but in fact, "a lot of it is out of our control"; a neurosurgeon - a scientist - bowing down and giving God's grace - a neurosurgeon. Our President had a choice, could've scored political points, but what did he do? He emerged as a father to our nation and healed.

You see you would never know when there might be someone in our midst thirsty to witness our experiences in our faith. It may be that you have been unemployed; searching for work and the Lord opened a door, a

window of opportunity for you – share it. It may be an illness and you found a cure or relief or a way to live with it in God’s grace – share it! It may be a domestic issue and somehow your relationship improved overnight - share it! You may be having a difficult time at work and mysteriously or miraculously began to experience relief – share it! The Scriptures tell us, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven.”

As the son of a Methodist minister - as I’m sure you probably see some of the traits in me - I am quite fortunate to have had the teachings of Christianity deeply rooted in my life and privileged to see the power of God move within my parent’s lives. It was not easy living in a minister’s home. This meant no nap time during the sermon;; Church every Sunday; Sunday school whether we liked it or not. We were always the first to arrive at church and the last ones to leave the church compound after Sunday services. Sunday was not for going to the beach Sunday was a full day of service and worship.

In retrospect however I am thankful for the structure and nurturing my siblings and I received for this has established a very strong foundation in our lives. In times of trouble I know where to turn. In times of success I know whom to praise. As the hymn goes “Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness morning by morning new mercies I see. All that I need thy hands keep providing, great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me” Through the challenges and success of my faith in God has been a constant force. Oh yes, I wrestle like most people from time to time through difficult issues, but I can testify today as I stand here before you that there has never been any adversity in my life or my family’s life where prayer and faith has not seen us through.

As I recall past challenges in a final Architectural Design class – this was years ago – faced with the adversity of a professor who seemed determined to expunge me from the University’s program for no apparent reason - only

to receive through the grace of God, because I knew of no where else to turn. At that time I didn't even know we had ombudsman program where as a student if you had some pressure from the professor you can actually go and file complaints. But then again, I was a foreign student so I was afraid that every move I made would be criticized. You're going up against the powers to be. So I was reluctant. At that moment of need, imagine this for a second; I am a student who through the years had put himself through school. This is the final design class. This professor knew his power. Never once came out and checked any of my work, so I was on my own. My friends urged me at the time, "Shika, leave the class. You will fail." For some reason, as stubborn as I am or maybe it was the power that was instilled in me when I saw my parents bend their knee so many times and pray. I went home, I told my wife; we prayed. And I can tell you at the end in the thesis presentation my professor's "C-" was counteracted by the architectural panel of professors who not only gave me the highest grade possible for my work but also questioned, they became the ombudsman contact for me, prayer.

The saga continued: upon my graduation from the School of Architecture in 1985 - poised and ready to return home to assume a place in contributing to my homeland in Sierra Leone only to realize our country was at war. But that was not the end, it gets better. Not only there was no access to our parents and loved ones, my visa was expiring; in fact I think it had expired. So I faced not only no country to go back to, but deportation. You see, when you put your hands in God's hands he works miracles for you.

In the recent past my wife and I ventured out and purchased our dream business only to close it down in the tumultuous economic meltdown of 2008. At first I told her, I said, we bared not too terrible a loss. But let me tell you, if I showed you the figures, we bared a huge loss. Within an economic climate when even our real estate broker, herself a proclaimed

Christian, described the sale as nothing short of a miracle. See, God sent a buyer when people were not even buying homes let alone businesses. We're still standing today.

You see, sometimes we pray earnestly for certain things but upon receiving them realize unexpected challenges and disappointments that accompany them. It may be a failed venture, a missed opportunity, not getting exactly what you may have prayed for, sometimes not getting any thing at all, and the list goes on. The question becomes what can and what do you do at this point? You prayed for it, you did everything you supposedly should have done. Is this where you give up and abandon your faith? Is this where you walk away and listen to the other side? No, No! Then how do you move on? Tough questions and not too many simple answers. Or is it that the answer of prayer and faith is so simple that we are challenged to question its power? As we celebrate Dr. King, a quote comes to mind that he made. Dr. King said, "Faith is taking the first step even without seeing the staircase." Think about this, if you can see the staircase you can walk on it. But faith is taking that first step without even seeing the whole staircase. "We should never be discouraged take everything to God in prayer"

Our actions during these difficult times and trying situations promote how we live in our faith. The decisions we make defines our leadership through service. In the words of Dr. King, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

In despair leaning on faith births hope. Faced with challenges, leaning on faith exposes opportunities. Put your hands in God's hands and let him show you the way. The Psalter we read earlier Psalm 40:1-2 states, "I waited patiently for the Lord, who inclined to me and heard my cry." It goes on to say, "The Lord drew me up from the desolate pit out of miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure" He didn't put your feet

on sand, if you wait upon him he will be there for you. When you step out on faith God sends his angels to rescue you. The blessings can be numerous and continuous. As I stand here today facing new challenges in my life, I have no doubt in my mind that God will make a way, not somehow, he will make a way. You see, I don't like the somehow because "somehow" tells me you are doubting; God will make a way. It is no secret what God can do. What he has done for others he will do for you. With arms wide open he will pardon you, just ask.

Pastor Young informed me that the second Sunday after Epiphany is celebrated within our United Methodist denomination as Human Relations Day. How we live in our faith influences and touches the lives around us. We are reminded in the book of Matthew 25:35-36, the manner in which Christians should relate to each other within and outside of the church. The book of Matthew states "I was hungered and you gave me meat: I was thirsty and you gave me drink: I was a stranger and you took me in naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me." Amen. In these words God was speaking to the righteous. He was in effect telling them how they had treated him when he was in need. But as people again, they reached out and questioned him. They said, "Lord, when did we ever see you hungry, naked and clothed you? Better yet, when did we ever see imprisoned and visited you? But as in verse 40 in Matthew, God responded and said, "In as much as you have serviced the least of these my Brethren you have done it unto me"

In closing, how are you serving as Christians today? Do you give in to your apprehensions when you see someone in need? Have you fed the hungry? Have you clothed the indigent in society? Do you lend your fellow man a listening ear? Do you give the elderly assistance on the bus or on the street? Do you walk blindly when somebody reaches out with a hand just looking for a penny or a piece of bread? Do you offer your skills in God's

service? Do you offer your free time? Do you use your God given gifts?
How are you living in your faith that others might be touched by the
Gospel you have received? We are asked every single day, not just
Sunday, to serve and lead. Through our service as Christians we can
provide good, strong and focused leadership. How is your service?

Amen.