

Congregational Church of Pinehurst
United Church of Christ
December 6, 2015
Advent2C

Luke 1:67-80
Luke 3:1-6

Sawukona!

A voice cries out in the wilderness...

Sawubona! Sawubona! Sawubona!

No it wasn't John the Baptist.

Or at least not exactly.

It was the voice of DeAmon Harges.

You see, DeAmon was the presenter for a day-long seminar
that John Arnold and Kevin Smith and I attended on Friday.

We were a diverse group of folks

gathered in the Children's Theatre

of the Walltown neighborhood of Durham.

We were gathered to hear about and experience

a model of community-building that serves to empower

persons living in marginalized neighborhoods,

and to transform the lives of the privileged.

Deamone began the seminar

with a South African Zulu call and response.

Sawubona! (you repeat after me)

Sawukona!

Sawubona means "I see you!"

Sawukona means "Its good to be seen!"

And although DeAmon wasn't exactly John the Baptist,
he wasn't far off, at least in his message.

In fact, I think old JB would have been pleased.

Like John the Baptist's message,

DeAmon's message was one of repentance

as a pathway to good news.

Not repentance in the garden variety sense
of being sorry for something,
but repentance in the more dynamic sense
of actually changing the direction of your life.

For too long poverty-ridden communities have been ignored.
And when those of us who are more privileged do see them,
We often try to fix them,
as if their **residents** are the problem
rather than the legal and cultural systems that keep them stuck.

That is the thing that needs fixing.

So DeAmon spent the day trying to help us
see these communities in a different way,
and thereby see ourselves differently as well.
Instead of seeing these communities as wilderness spaces
where nothing good is going on,

DeAmon trains community organizers and allies
to take the time live with and get to know the people
of a community as neighbors.

And instead of seeing them as a dried up wilderness people,
to partner with them in coming to recognize
and mobilize their unique gifts---
gifts even they may have forgotten they had.

Outside resources that flow into marginalized communities,
can then be used by the residents themselves to determine
their own future,

rather than to fund programs created by people
who don't live in the community,
but naively and sometimes arrogantly
think we know better.

And that's why DeAmon's cry in the wilderness is so apropos.
Sawubona! I see you.

Sawuboka! It's good to be seen.

It is good news to be seen in the wilderness

when you are seen with the eyes of compassion and justice.
But you have to see your brothers and sisters
as children of God and not as problems or
market commodities in order for that to happen.

As people of privilege
we have to repent of our arrogant tendency
to measure the worth of other communities
by our own standards,
rather than by the standards of the kin-dom of God.

Only then will we come to understand that
what we saw only as wilderness,
is actually a place where blossoms can and do flourish.

But there are other wildernesses that we would like to ignore.

Whether it is the wilderness of gun violence
and its death-dealing affects,
or the wilderness of environmental abuse
resulting in the dire threat of climate change,
there is a voice crying out in the wilderness----

A voice calling us to see the reality of the situation and respond.
It may not initially feel good to see and face reality.

We often don't want to face the pain of the wilderness,
Preferring to take a pill to numb the pain---

Or move the poor away from the shopping
district where they cannot be seen—

Or bomb the “enemy” out of existence.

But though ignorance might feel easier in the short-run,
The wilderness will not blossom until we look deeper
Into the causes of the wilderness

And not merely its symptoms,

In some cases becoming aware
of our own complicity in creating the wilderness.

But for the wilderness to bloom,

We must see more clearly,
And respond with changed lives and changed societies.

Prophetic voices come crying into these wilderness places,
like it or not,
crying "Sawubona!" I see you.
I see the reality of the situation.
And through a process of repentance
we can mature to respond "Sawukona"!
It is good to be seen---even in our fear and resistance!
Because only then can we come to change,
so that the world might live.

And each of us knows a wilderness first-hand---
Privileged or poor,
Black or white or brown,
Gay or straight or bisexual or transgendered,
Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jew,
Liberal or conservative.
We all know the wilderness first-hand.
There are places in all our lives at times
in which we feel fearful and lonely and despairing.
We may not want to be seen in these dire moments.
Shame or addiction or anger or fear
may make a connection with community more difficult.
We may want to hide from John the Baptist
and all his prophetic minions.
And yet nevertheless, a voice cries in the wilderness.
Prepare a way for the Lord.

Sawubona! I see you!

I see that you **can** repent, change, and go in a different direction.
I see that you can find and receive forgiveness.
I see that you can offer forgiveness when the time is right.
I see that you have gifts
that can create paths of healing in your own life,
and in the lives of those around you.
I see that you have the capacity to move and be moved to a place
in which it is once again good to be seen.

And when we can be that just, prophetic voice,
and those compassionate, seeing eyes for one another,
we remind one another of our giftedness,
and we bring the wilderness just a bit closer
to the reality of the kin-dom of God.

I am an unapologetic universalist at heart.
I believe that this ongoing saving process
of repentance and forgiveness,
of seeing and being seen,
of preparing the way and being the way,
is a process that will eventually have its way with all of us.
I believe that no individual or community
can forever escape the grace-filled love and justice
that continuously flow forth from the life of God.

I believe old JB when he spouts out an old prophecy from Isaiah
that **every** valley shall be filled,
and **every** mountain leveled,
and **all** crooked tricks straightened,
And **all** the rough mean-spiritedness smoothed.
And all flesh, all flesh, all flesh shall see it together!”

Sawubona!
Sawukona!
I see you and you see me!
And, by God, it's good to be seen!

Amen and Amen.

Rev. Brent A. Bissette