

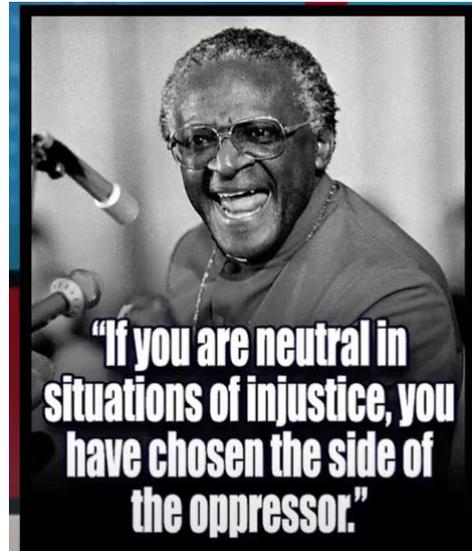
Weekly Reflection

Christmas 2C, 2022

A Tribute to South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu

An inspiration for our 2022 New Year's resolutions

The passing of the South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu last Sunday presents us with a real sense of loss, and gratitude. He fought for racial justice and rights, for equality and justice for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality or ability, a peacemaker. He always led with hope, truth and courage. His great wisdom and moral compass was matched only by his love and devotion to helping others. One of my greatest inspirations and examples. *May he rest in peace.*



Tumultuous times

Desmond Mpilo Tutu was born October 7, 1931, in Klerksdorp, a town in South Africa's Transvaal province. His father was a teacher and his mother was a domestic worker, and young Tutu had plans to become a doctor, partly thanks to a boyhood bout of tuberculosis, which put him in the hospital for more than a year. He even qualified for medical school, he said. But his parents couldn't afford the fees, so teaching beckoned. However, he was horrified at the state of Black South African schools, and even more horrified when the Bantu Education Act was passed in 1953 that racially segregated the nation's education system. He resigned in protest. Not long after, the Bishop of Johannesburg agreed to accept him for the priesthood. The 1960s and 1970s were tumultuous times in South Africa. In March 1960, 69 people were killed in the Sharpeville Massacre, when South African police opened fire on a crowd of protesters. Mandela -- then a firebrand leading an armed wing of the ANC -- was arrested, tried and, in 1964, sentenced to life in prison. In the early '70s, the government forced millions of Black people to settle in what were called "homelands." Tutu spent many of these years in Great Britain, watching from afar, but finally returned for good in 1975, when he was appointed dean of St. Mary's Cathedral in Johannesburg. The next year he was consecrated Bishop of Lesotho. He gained renown for a May 1976 letter he wrote to the prime minister, warning of unrest.

A distinctive figure

As the government became increasingly oppressive -- detaining Black people, establishing onerous laws -- Tutu became increasingly outspoken. "He was one of the most hated people, particularly by White South Africa, because of the stance he took," according to former Truth and Reconciliation Commission member Alex Boraine.

A South African Council of Churches colleague said, "His moral authority (was) both his weapon and his shield, enabling him to confront his oppressors with a rare impunity." He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984.

Desmond Tutu, in his own words: 'God, I don't mind if I die now'

After reeling off the prejudices and inequalities of the apartheid system, Tutu summed up his thoughts. "In short," he said, "this land, richly endowed in so many ways, is sadly lacking in justice."

There were more injustices to come: assassinations, allegations of hit squads, bombings. In 1988, two years after being named Archbishop of Cape Town, becoming the first Black man to head the Anglican Church in South Africa, Tutu was arrested while taking an anti-apartheid petition to South Africa's parliament.

But the tide was turning. The next year, Tutu led a 20,000-person march in Cape Town. Also in 1989, a new president, F.W. de Klerk, started easing apartheid laws. Finally, on February 11, 1990, Mandela was released from prison after 27 years. De Klerk died last month.

Four years later, in 1994, Mandela would be elected president. Tutu compared being allowed to vote for the first time to "falling in love" and said -- behind the birth of his first child -- introducing Mandela as the country's new president was the greatest moment of his life.

"I actually said to God, I don't mind if I die now,"

Controversial stances

Tutu's work was not done, however. In 1995 Mandela appointed him chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to address the human rights violations of the apartheid years. Tutu broke down at the TRC's first hearing in 1996.

The TRC gave its report to the government in 1998. Tutu established the Desmond Tutu Peace Trust the same year.

He returned to teaching, becoming a visiting professor at Emory University in Atlanta for two years and later lecturing at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He published a handful of books, including "No Future Without Forgiveness" (1999), "God Is Not a Christian" (2011), and a children's book, "Desmond and the Very Mean Word" (2012).

He retired from public service in 2010 but remained unafraid to take controversial positions. He called for a boycott of Israel in 2014 and said that former US President George W. Bush and former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair should be "made to answer" at the International Criminal Court for their actions around the Iraq war.

(Source: adapted from CNN news brief)

Desmond Tutu, 1990, The UNESCO Courier

The oppression of the majority of people in South Africa has been on the basis of race. The iniquity of racism is that it leads people who feel superior to others to treat them as less than human. So racists facing mass protests are, for example, less hesitant in ordering police or troops to kill demonstrators than rulers who feel they would be killing their compatriots. In South Africa our people have suffered racial oppression for three hundred years. They have constantly struggled to be able to participate in a democratic system but they have never achieved it. Economically, for the whole of the industrialised era our people have been denied opportunities for learning and for jobs because of the colour of our skins. As a result, we begin to see a democracy emerge in South Africa, we are going to need massive international assistance to give the opportunities ...

(Jim Wallis, Sojourners): “during the deepest, darkest days of apartheid when the government tried to shut down opposition by canceling a political rally, archbishop Desmond Tutu declared that he would hold a church service instead. St. George’s cathedral in Cape Town, South Africa was filled with worshippers. Outside the cathedral hundreds of police gathered, a show of force intended to intimidate. As Tutu was preaching they entered the cathedral, armed, and lined the walls. They took out notebooks and recorded Tutu’s words. But Tutu would not be intimidated. He preached against the evils of apartheid, declaring it could not endure. At one extraordinary point he addressed the police directly.

‘You are powerful. You are very powerful, but you are not gods and I serve a God who cannot be mocked. So, since you’ve already lost, since you’ve already lost, I invite you today to come and join the winning side!’

With that the congregation erupted in dance and song. The police didn’t know what to do. Their attempts at intimidation had failed, overcome by the archbishop’s confidence that God and goodness would triumph over evil. It was but a matter of time.”

What faith and courage! To unflinchingly look the perpetrators of evil in the eye and have such confidence about the bigger picture is inspirational.

He was a prophet, a priest and a pastor all rolled into one. Rip. ‘til we see him again.

(Sourced and adapted from Rev Sandy Boyce, Pilgrim Uniting Church, Adelaide)