

The scripture reading for today comes from the story of King David who lived 1000 years before Jesus. David was a powerful ruler and consolidated the Israelites into one nation. He rose from the shepherd boy who naively faced Goliath to become an aggressive general, and powerful king. Like many people in power he fell prey to temptation and he abused his power one day when he lured Bathsheba, the wife of one of his generals to his home. Bad as his sexual infidelity was, it was his ruthless attempt to cover it that got him into real trouble. His efforts to conceal his infidelity led to his decision to order that the husband of Bathsheba be killed in battle. That was his worst deed. The prophet Nathan watched it all and wondered how to reach King David. So he came and told him a story- which stirred David's sense of injustice, and proved to be an analogy for David's misdeed. Suddenly David felt remorse.

II Samuel 12:1-7

Desmond Tutu: Entrepreneur of the Spirit

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June 2, 2013

Our sermon topic this summer is "Today's Saints". Why spend the summer talking about saints, and modern ones at that? The answer lies in the fact that we all search for people of faith whose lives can offer encouragement or inspiration. We seek people whose lives offer examples of courage or spiritual guidance.

When I was young I had a friend whose mother had a St. Anthony medal hanging in her car. I asked about it and learned that St. Anthony was the patron of missing things. When my friend's mother lost things she would pray to find them. Even as a child, this sounded odd to my Protestant sensibilities, and it struck me as a little superstitious. But as I reflected on this lady and the medals in her car, I came to appreciate, though I could not put it into words at the time, that my friend's mother did not just lose things. There was something about her that seemed a little lost. Holding on to St. Anthony helped her stay grounded, and gave her security. St. Anthony helped her feel connected to God.

Saints do that for us. Whether they are the official saints from Roman Catholic tradition or the more modern pilgrims who have become examples that encourage us, they all help us to find our way.

The Roman Catholic Church has a very elaborate process of consecrating a saint officially. This sermon series looks at contemporary men and women – alive today or in the last 100 years- 100 years, and whose faith made them strong, or changed our world.

Today I will be talking about Desmond Tutu. I believe that the people who inspire us speak to us for two reasons. 1. They are exemplary. 2. Their story connects to ours. Why have I chosen Desmond Tutu? 1. Since I was a child listening to missionaries in my home church I often thought a lot about Africa. It was a dream of mine to go there, and when I took my Sabbatical in 2007 it was the trip of a lifetime to travel to Cape Town and Durban – meeting missionaries and talking to people. 2. The other reason I appreciate Tutu so much is because his faith is the bedrock of his personality. He really believes that God holds the world; he really believes that good will triumph. Each time I hear him speak his words his faith finds a fertile niche in me. I feel lifted. For me, God speaks through this man.

Desmond Tutu was the archbishop of St. George’s Cathedral in Cape Town for 10 years from 1986-1996. During that time his compassion and kindness transformed this formal Cathedral into a place known as the “people’s church”.

Tutu made his mark on human history when he headed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 1996-1998. His imaginative approach to the painful transition from colonialism to democracy in South Africa was unique. Since Roman Times when armies defeated one another they imposed Victor’s Justice. The victor treated the vanquished with a different set of rules, subjugating them and punishing them more harshly. Even today when countries throw off colonial rule the new governments often root out abusive leaders from the past and inflict retribution. Given the history of violent racism and institutional economic deprivation, no one would have faulted South Africans for punishing the apartheid government. You might imagine that this country would be awash in rage and turmoil following democracy.

But President Mandela and Desmond Tutu envisioned something different for South Africa. They believed that the human rights abuses of apartheid were so demeaning and demoralizing that if the country would ever heal enough to really move on to lasting peace, they would have to foster reconciliation. The Truth and Justice Commission invited people who had grievances to come forward and tell their stories. It was a massive administrative effort and broadcast over radio every Sunday for over 2 years.

People who had perpetrated crimes against humanity were brought to justice, but well over 7000 people requested amnesty and apologized for their actions. Families who had witnessed atrocities faced those who had committed these deeds, and re-counted the torture, or murder they had seen. People who were responsible or complicit apologized. 849 people were granted amnesty and over 5,000 people were refused amnesty. But this public period of story-telling and mourning led to healing, forgiveness and human transformation, unprecedented in our world today.

The process was new in western history. After at least 25 centuries of victor justice where we punish evil-doers without acknowledging their humanity Desmond Tutu served as the architect of this new process of reconciliation. Through it all, this man of faith reminded a startled and dis-believing world that even the worst systemic evil responds to compassion. He reminded us that punishment is not all it is cracked up to be, and seeing your enemy as another human being changes the world.

What can we learn from Desmond Tutu?

In the first place, he is humility but a person of great stature. Desmond Tutu is short by modern standards, and his personality is impish. But he is a man of stature and courage. Born in Kerckdorf, he was a teacher in the Bantu high school for 2 years. A young man of promise, he was recruited to this education system designed to kill the spirit of Black youth. Tutu resigned in protest and met a Black priest who became a mentor. Tutu got an opportunity to go to London to take his degree in

theology, and returned home to fight apartheid as a priest. Even then he believed in the power of spiritual and moral vision. As a young man he said, “Stability and peace will not come from the barrel of a gun. Peace without justice is not possible.” Though he spent his life fighting apartheid, he did so as a servant of God.

When he was archbishop of Lesotho, Tutu remained clear about non-violence. It was a hard time and some people took up arms, but instead Tutu brought national and international attention to the violence of apartheid and supported economic boycotts. In the end the international boycotts proved to be most effective in toppling the government and bringing about lasting change. Desmond Tutu spoke the truth but he did not draw attention to himself. Instead he led the world to discover the cause he believed in.

In the 2nd place, he trusts God so much he believes in human nature. For my scripture lesson today I recounted the story of the prophet Nathan. I chose this story because Nathan was an ancient prophet who reminds me of Desmond Tutu. Nathan stood up to corruption but he did it by telling a story. He knew the power of stories to transform to prick someone’s conscience and bring change. Nathan held up a mirror and helped David see what he had done. The beauty of it is Nathan did not need to do more than that.

Tutu is wise in many of the same ways. He held up a mirror to the whole nation of South Africa and let the stories speak the truth. We are all tempted to de-humanize our enemies. We are tempted to assume that other people have no conscience, or cannot change. It is tempting to imagine that even God cannot reach the people we loath. The Bible reminds us often to tell our story, hold up a mirror, and let God work in the conscience of the person we fear. It is not as controlling. It is not satisfying if we are looking for vengeance.

“Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones is not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness. Sometimes it makes things worse. It is risky but worthwhile, because in the end only honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing.”

Last month Tutu was awarded the Templeton Prize. Worth \$1.7 million, the Templeton prize is offered annually to someone in the field of spirituality and religion. Desmond Tutu was chosen for “embracing such universal concepts of the image of God within each person, and demonstrating that the innate humanity in each of us is intrinsically tied to the humanity between all peoples. “

Finally Desmond Tutu’s faith has brought him joy. All you have to do is look at his face and you will feel something of his warmth. Desmond Tutu lifts my spirit. Listening to him talk makes me smile, and brings great peace. At the 2010 opening of the Soccer World Cup Tutu gave way to dancing. Standing on the podium, he charmed the world enjoyed his delight at being alive. Tutu did not stand stiff cloaked in religious pomp as so many clerics do. He gave himself to the moment and shared his joy.

He wrote “We are made to enjoy music, beautiful sunsets, to enjoy looking at billows of the sea and to be thrilled with a rose that is bedecked with dew...human beings are actually created for the transcendent, for the sublime, for the beautiful, for the truthful... and all of us are given the task of trying to make this world a little more hospitable to these beautiful things.”

Tutu believes this is a moral universe and right and wrong matter. Mercifully, gloriously, right will prevail.”¹ Though wrong gratifies in a moment, good yields its gifts over a lifetime.

¹ Tutu’s work on forgiveness wins prize” [Christian Century](#) May 1, 2013 p. 14.

“Out of the cacophony of random suffering and chaos that can mark human life, the life artist creates a symphony of meaning and order. A life of wholeness does not depend on what we experience. Wholeness depends on how we experience our lives. “

Finally, from his book, God Has a Dream, “Dear child of God, I write these words because we all experience sadness; we all come at times to despair and we lose hope that the suffering in our lives and in the world will never end. I want to share with you my faith and understanding that this suffering can be transformed and redeemed. There is no such thing as a totally hopeless case. Our God is an expert in dealing with chaos, with brokenness and with all the worst that we can imagine. God created order out of disorder, cosmos out of chaos, and God can do so always, can do so now, in our personal lives and in our lives as nations, globally. Indeed, God is transforming the world now, through us- Because God loves us.”²

² Tutu, Desmond, God has a Dream: A vision of Hope in our Time.