

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

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DESMOND TUTU



(Photo By Stephen Voss/Redux/eyevine)

During this Black History Month 2022, I want to honor Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu who died recently in Cape Town South Africa. Desmond Tutu, a Black South African and Nobel Laureate, is revered around the world especially for his work to attain peace and freedom in Apartheid South Africa.

His love of Christ and his leadership as priest and bishop in South Africa is characterized by his message of truth, justice, and his love for the poor and oppressed. What drove Desmond Tutu was his theology that is often called “The

Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu". The concept of Ubuntu is a cultural concept but evident in Tutu's theological practices and writings because it is so deeply pointing to the practice of community and inclusion. He describes it as "my humanity is bound up in yours". The concept became very popular in the United States and across the world as people sought ideas to deal with growing conflict and strife and in particular within the US, where persistent racial divisions still demand that we have to find better practices, in civil and religious life characteristic of compassion, deep respect, and acceptance of each other.

Tutu believed that it was through his Christian faith and the call of the gospel to love each other, to even love our enemies, that Ubuntu, which he grew up with became even more meaningful. He wrote in his book, "Crying in the Wilderness", a collection of sermons and speeches that we can only be fully human if we accepted the humanity of the other. He stated, a person is a person through other persons, thereby showing that we are all created through divine love, in God's image and that we bear the spirit of God, even if we don't recognize it.

Tutu lived through the brutality of Apartheid, a government practice of separation and oppression in South Africa. He grew up and was subjected to harsh conditions in his communities, racial inequality and as a schoolteacher experienced the government's utter neglect of black communities. While the government declared itself as Christian, he realized that their theological practices did very little to oppose their practices of oppression, exploitation, and White racial superiority beliefs. Blacks were barred from homeownership, driven off ancestral lands, and relegated to menial labor in the gold mines.

When I met Tutu, I was an angry activist, and my resentment drove me to want desperately to get back at the evil government that oppressed me and killed my fellow countrymen. After attending the South African Christian Leadership assembly where I met Desmond Tutu, his theology of love, human value, and non-violence appealed to me. He encouraged us through bible studies at his home, to show that we are true witnesses of a gospel that proves our value as humans because Christ gave his life to show it, and while people who do evil deeds or oppress fellow human beings, either because of race, gender, economic status or other reasons, often disregard that value and remain ignorant to it, we should live it. It should be part of our leadership, our faith practices, and our character as

people of God. The lessons I learned from the “Arch”, as we called him, have shaped my view of reconciliation in Christ and will remain with me as a Christian.

The following is an African prayer often quoted by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Disturb us, O Lord
when we are too well-pleased with ourselves
when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little,
because we sailed too close to the shore.
Disturb us, O Lord
when with the abundance of things we possess,
we have lost our thirst for the water of life
when, having fallen in love with time,
we have ceased to dream of eternity
and in our efforts to build a new earth,
we have allowed our vision of Heaven to grow dim.
Stir us, O Lord
to dare more boldly, to venture into wider seas
where storms show Thy mastery,
where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.
In the name of Him who pushed back the horizons of our hopes
and invited the brave to follow.

Dr. Leon Rodrigues
President and CEO

