

GUEST: ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU

LSS 607 (LENGTH: 26:46)

FIRST AIR DATE: 10/9/12

My father was a schoolmaster, and I went with him to shop, and all the shops were in town. And there was a slip of a girl behind the counter, a White girl, young enough to be my father's grandchild, really. And she turned to serve my father and said, Yes, Boy? And I wondered what my father was feeling, the headmaster of a school, and here he is with his seven-year-old son, and he is called Boy in the presence of his son.

Many of us live our lives trying to make a difference in our world. Whether we do it by donating our time or money to worthy causes, or just taking the time to listen to someone's troubles, making a difference can sometimes define us as human beings. But what if we devoted our lives to changing an entire culture, righting a wrong in place for decades, putting ourselves and our loved ones in danger because we decided to stand up against a system of injustice? Such is the life of Nobel Peace Laureate, Desmond Tutu.

Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox is Hawaii's first weekly television program produced and broadcast in high definition.

Aloha kakou. I'm Leslie Wilcox. In August of 2012, the retired Anglican Arch Bishop of Cape Town, South Africa, Desmond Tutu, was invited to Honolulu to help mark the 150th year of the Episcopal Church in Hawaii. A Nobel Peace Laureate, Arch Bishop Tutu is best known for his strong, peaceful opposition to Apartheid that's the legally mandated racial segregation that divided South Africa from 1948 to 1994. During his visit to Hawaii, Arch Bishop Tutu kindly allowed us to sit down with him and talk story. He's seen some of the worst that life has to give, and his response his peace, understanding, and forgiveness.

The person who is regarded as the architect of Apartheid, Dr. Hendrick Verwoerd, who became Prime Minister of South Africa at one point, used an odd. He said, Because we can't feed all the children, we won't feed some. Now, just imagine if you say, Well, we can't cure all the people who suffer from TB, so we're not going to try and cure the ones that we can. Now, a crazy justification but ... racism is crazy. [CHUCKLE] There weren't too many occasions when you sort of felt sorry for yourself. I mean, we played, and just went on and thought, Well, this is how life is ordered, and that is how it's going to

go on. It was a little later that you began asking, when you read a history textbook that said almost always, it would describe the Khoisans stole cattle from the settlers. Okay. But each time, they would say the settlers captured cattle from the Khoisans. And you said, But, I mean, where did they get their cattle from? I mean, coming as they did from overseas, they surely ought to have had to buy or do something to own cattle, because the only people who owned cattle when they came were the Black farmers. That was when you began to be slightly politicized. We were far less politicized on the kind of kids you got in 1976, the 16th of June in Soweto when you had the uprising.

But even with a growing awareness of the racial oppression by the White upper class in South Africa, Desmond Tutu's heart could not hate. And as a teen when he was stricken with a disease that nearly took his life, the future Arch Bishop learned about compassion from an Anglican priest, a White priest.

By and large, many of us would not have been educated, had it not been for the schools that were established by missionaries from overseas. Many of us would not have been alive without the clinics and hospitals that that they provided. Yeah. Well, I, like many others succumbed to tuberculosis, and I spent, in fact, twenty months.

Twenty?

Yeah; twenty months. It was when they didn't have all the new style drugs, and you went into what was really an isolation hospital. I was in this large ward, and noticed that almost always, those patients who hemorrhaged, coughed up blood, ended up being pushed out to the morgue, what we call a mortuary. And, lo and behold, one day, I went into the toilet and started coughing, and I coughed up blood. And I said, Well, anyone who does this that I've seen, end up being carried out on a stretcher out to the morgue. And very strangely, actually, I said, Well, if I am going to die, I'm going to die. But I had wonderful people who cared for us.

Including a White man, who'd become a mentor of sorts by that time.

Trevor Huddleston. He was quite amazing. I knew that he would visit me at least once every week, and I knew he was a very busy person. I mean, his schedule was very tight. And it did something to you inside to say, Here is this guy from overseas, a White man who makes you feel so special. You're a township urchin, and I owe a very great deal to him. I know that many others regarded him as an incredible mentor. I don't know whether you know Hugh Masekela. Hugh Masekela is one of our top jazz musicians, and he's a trumpeter. And Trevor Huddleston bought him his first trumpet from Louis Satchmo Armstrong. Really. And that was just a fantastic thing. But that was Trevor all over. He really helped to, I think, exorcise from many of us hate of White people. Because you said, Well, if there's someone who can put himself out to such an extent for us, then they can't all be bad. [CHUCKLE]

In his play Twelfth Night, Shakespeare wrote: Be not afraid of greatness; some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. Influenced by a White clergyman who did not see the world in Black and White, unwilling to enable a society that perpetuated racism, Desmond Tutu had greatness thrust upon him. He likes to say that nature abhors a vacuum, and that's how he became a leader.

I had wanted to be a physician. And I was admitted to medical school, but then, we didn't [CHUCKLE]—we didn't have enough money to be able to send me to medical school. So, I opted to go and train as a teacher, because we were getting scholarships to be able to do that. And it was only when the government introduced what they called Bantu education that my wife and I, who were both teachers, decided no, we didn't want to be part of this where we were going to be giving our children this horrendous stuff.

Unequal education?

Yeah. I mean, it was worse than what we had had. Ours was also in some ways unequal. I mean, the resources were unequal. When Verwoerd came in, he decided, no, things like mathematics, what does a Black child need mathematics for? No, they mustn't study the American War of Independence, the French Revolution. Those will put subversive ideas into their heads.

So, the government became more regressive.

Yeah. And was awful. It was quite awful. And he said quite unabashedly, the aim of Bantu education is to teach Black children enough English and Afrikaans, which were the languages of the White people, enough English and Afrikaans so that they can understand instructions by their White—he said that publicly, openly. So, we decided, no thank you, we don't want to be part of this, having to feed our children a travesty. And I didn't have too many options, so I said, Maybe, maybe I might become a priest. And it so happened that the Bishop decided he would accept me. Yes. And I have said that I was a leader by default, really. It was because our real leaders were either in jail, Nelson Mandela and all these others were on Robben Island, or they were in exile. All were restricted somehow or other by the Apartheid government. So, God doesn't allow, or nature doesn't allow for a vacuum, and I happened to go and fill in that particular vacuum.

In a time when high emotions threatened to turn into bloodshed, Arch Bishop Tutu put himself in harm's way to quell the potential violence in South Africa. In one incident, he saved the life of a man who was being beaten because the Black community suspected him of being an informant. Another time, Tutu stood between armed White police officer and hundreds of angry young Blacks, and diffused a situation that could have easily turned into violence.

And the way you filled that vacuum was extremely dangerous to you. I mean, there literally were people on one hand throwing stones, and people on the other hand with guns, and you got up by yourself and stood between them.

When you've got a crowd of ten thousand, you can't really depend on a script. You've got to try to hold the people somehow in the palm of your hand, their mood can change just like that. And, yeah, we were fortunate. I mean, people got to accept that we were their leaders, even if we were leaders by default. Partly, you gained a credibility by the fact that you did stand up to a vicious system. I mean, you did say, We won't accept this. You might want to turn us into less than human beings, we are human. We know that we have been created in the image of God, we don't need your permission, White people, to realize that we too have been created in the image of God. We too have an intrinsic worth that doesn't depend on you. I mean, for me, it wasn't a political creed. It was my faith, it was my Biblical faith that inspired me.

When violent uprisings threatened South Africa, Arch Bishop Tutu called upon other nations not to invest any money in the country until it did away with legally mandated racial segregation. Though he was aware that this economic boycott would hurt everyone in South Africa, especially the Black populous, he believed that a nonviolent protest would have better long term results for the nation as a whole.

And did your faith tell you that one day, Apartheid would be abolished in South Africa?

Yes. I mean, the way things happen in a moral universe is that ultimately, right will prevail.

Now, what makes you say it's a moral universe?

Because it is. I mean, it might take long, but wrong will ultimately get its comeuppance. Just look. I mean, when you look at history, you see, I mean, that, hey, here is Caesar, and he's ruling the roost and thinks he's cock of the walk. And, he bites the dust. Hitler ... Mussolini ... Amin. I mean, you look at them. Yes, it may take a very, very long time, but as sure as anything, they will get their comeuppance.

Which reminds me of the questions you must get all the time from people as a faith leader. You know, people saying, Well, why does God want us to suffer, why does He allow this suffering, why am I suffering more than other people?

Oh, yeah; yeah.

You must get that all the time.

Well, yes. I mean, ultimately, you can't pretend that you know everything aspect of it, but you can say some things. One is that God created us to be persons, which means that we have freedom of choice. And God, incredible. I mean, it really is incredible. I mean, look at the Holocaust. You say, For goodness sake, God, why did You not intervene? And God says, Look, I gave them freedom of choice, I gave them the freedom to choose good, and to

choose wrong. And if the Nazis who are in power choose wrong, if I intervene, I am subverting the gift that I have given. And there is a time when God is impotent, you know. And that is the glory of our God.

Spend any amount of time with Arch Bishop Tutu, and you'll hear him laugh. It catches you by surprise, because he laughs at some of the most unexpected moments.

We only talked a short time, but I've noticed a couple of things. You tend to understate, the conditions were very bad and you were deathly ill, but you don't paint that grim a picture, and you laugh. The Dalai Lama does the same thing, doesn't he?

Yeah, he's more mischievous. I'm more serious.

You are not that serious. [CHUCKLE]

More dignified.

[CHUCKLE]

I mean, I've had to say to him, he'll probably pull my cap off my head, and I say, Sh-h, the cameras are on us. Try to behave like a holy man. [CHUCKLE]

The two of you are laughing over there.

[CHUCKLE] Yes.

But do you find that humor is needed in a profession such as yours, when there's just so much misery you're exposed to?

I don't know that I could have, I mean, I wake up in the morning, and I say, Now, look here, Tutu, you've got to joke about this or that. It just happens that well, maybe that was a gift that God gave for us to be able to survive. Yeah. And actually, our people were remarkably I mean, they had a wonderful funny truth, actually. Because even at their worst moments, like you have a funeral where you've had a massacre of thirty, forty people, and it's gloom, and there's a lot of tension, telling a funny story made—I mean, the tension just eased out of people, and they realize, I mean, that despite what the Apartheid system was trying to do to them, they were human. They had a dignity, and they needed to know that there was nothing ultimately that someone else could do which would undermine their humanity, ultimately. That they were in charge. If you didn't laugh, if we didn't laugh, we would have been crying far too much.

Arch Bishop Tutu has seen firsthand the abominations that human beings can inflict on one another. He has seen mankind at its worst. And yet, one of the teachings that he communicates to the world is forgiveness.

What you've said is, It gives us the capacity to make a new start, and forgiveness is grace by which you're able to get the other person to get up, get up with dignity to begin anew. But how do you see forgiveness? You can't forgive someone without being very clear on what they did to hurt; right?

Yes. I mean, forgiving isn't saying you're pretending that they didn't hurt you. You don't pretend, and you don't pretend that it's all okay. There are certain conditions. Yeah. I mean, you're saying, I hope the culprit will have the grace to acknowledge that they made a mistake or they hurt me. But, if you are going to wait for the perpetrator to be ready to ask for forgiveness, to be penitent, you are binding yourself into a victim mode. You are saying, I depend on him. Whereas, you can say, I am ready to forgive you, and I forgive you. And then, it is like a gift. It is up to him or her to accept the gift. But you are then released from the victim mode, and you can get on with your life. But it isn't easy, it isn't also feeling good. You know, it's a decision that you have to make. It's not anything that has to do merely with feeling, but you can, in having forgiven, get to feel good. But it is, in fact, also [CHUCKLE] good for your health.

Not to become embittered and hang onto these griefs.

Yes. You know anger, it raises your blood pressure, and can get to a point where it gives you stomach ulcers. So, forgiving, apart from anything else, is good for your health.

Have you had trouble forgiving?

I have had times when I thought this was very close to being unforgivable. During the times of the struggle, Leah and I often got telephone calls with death threats. And sometimes, I mean, the people who called were not able to get directly to us. Maybe one of the children would pick up the phone, and you could see by the fact of your child stiffening, that, oh, one of those kind of calls has come. And I often thought, I mean, this is really unconscionable. This person is aware that they're not speaking to me or to Leah, they're speaking to a child, and they still say something like, Go tell your father that we are going to kill him, or something, you know. And that, for me, was very close to being unforgivable, where they also were trying to get at us by getting at our children, which I didn't think was playing by the rules. [CHUCKLE]

In today's celebrity-driven world, it's getting more difficult to find real heroes, men and women who are willing to put themselves at risk for what they believe in, someone like Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu, who helped make a difference for the people and the country he loves. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. *A hui hou kakou.*

For audio and written transcripts of this program, and all episodes of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, visit pbshawaii.org.

I think each of us is being asked to help make this world slightly more beautiful, slightly more gentle, slightly more caring, slightly more compassionate. Uh, and it can be. I mean, if we ... just realize, I—I mean, that um ... we are ultimately meant to live as members of one family. God's family.