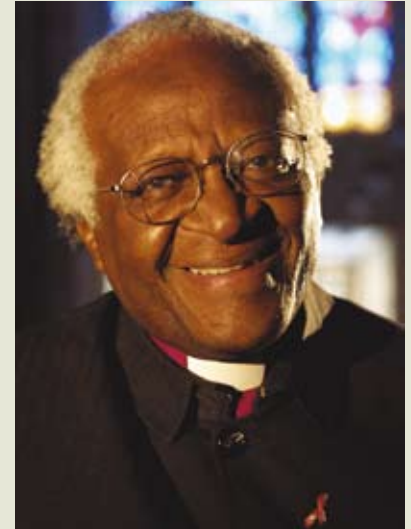




inspiring individuals



Archbishop Desmond Tutu was instrumental in overturning apartheid in South Africa, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his inspirational activism, and he continues to campaign against injustice in the world. Luke Bell looks at the life of this extraordinary man.

Born in Klerksdorp, South Africa on 7th October 1931, Desmond Tutu began a life that would impact and inspire humanity across the globe. It is hard to know what to mention and what to leave out when casting a glance over his incredible life. There are so many noble actions, so many heart-warming stories, a library of wisdom and a multitude of achievements and awards. So, how best to summarise this great man's life? Why not in the wise words of the man himself? "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. I am not interested in picking up crumbs of compassion thrown from the table of someone who considers himself my master. I want the full menu of rights."

Desmond Tutu was one of the leading figures in the fight against apartheid in South Africa. He became the first black Anglican Dean of Johannesburg in 1975 and utilized that mantle to oppose the government's racism as a defiance of God's will. Tutu's outspoken opposition to apartheid subjected him to continual harassment from the state security police. A number of activists at the time were 'banned' which meant they were subjected to strict restrictions on travel and communication with others and placed under constant surveillance.

Mamphela Ramphele, now a trustee for the Rockefeller Foundation, was banished to a remote rural area as a result of her activism. She recalls that Archbishop Tutu disregarded threats from the security police and called her once a week to comfort her during this troubling time. It is just one recount from many of Tutu's extraordinary humanity in such oppressive circumstances. He continued tirelessly to speak out against the injustice of apartheid and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his efforts.

He used his Nobel lecture, upon receiving the award, to raise public awareness of the injustices taking place in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. "I have spoken extensively about South Africa, first because it is the land I know best, but because it is also a microcosm of the world and an example of what is to be found in other lands in differing degree - when there is injustice, invariably peace becomes a casualty," he explained. "We (humanity) have the capacity to feed ourselves several times over, but we are daily haunted by the spectacle of the gaunt dregs of humanity shuffling along in endless queues, with bowls to collect what the charity of the world has provided, too little too late."

Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990. A

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up in 1994 to oversee the process of retribution and amnesty for human rights violations. Mandela asked Archbishop Tutu to chair the TRC. Described by many as "South Africa's moral conscience," Archbishop Tutu continues to campaign vigorously for human rights throughout the world.

In July 2007, Nelson Mandela, Graça Machel, and Desmond Tutu convened The Elders, a group of world leaders to contribute their wisdom, leadership and integrity to tackle some of the world's toughest problems. Archbishop Tutu is Chair of the group who have campaigned against numerous injustices worldwide, including the discrimination against women and girls on the grounds of religion, the promotion of peace, justice and democracy in Sudan, addressing the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe and most recently supporting a peaceful transition in Burma/Myanmar. Nelson Mandela introduces the group of eminent global leaders, "Let us call them global elders, not because of their age, but because of their individual and collective reason."

Desmond Tutu has now setup the Tutu Peace Foundation which uses the experience from South Africa to inspire a new generation of visionary peace builders. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in August 2009 as an agent of change. "These extraordinary men and women, these agents of change, remind us that excellence is not beyond our abilities, that hope lies around the corner, and that justice can still be won in the forgotten corners of this world," said President Obama.

Yet, Tutu himself believes that only through working together as a race can we truly tackle injustice in this world; "My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together." And, he has never been one to keep emotions under wraps - he has been known to shed a tear in public as well as dissolve into infectious laughter. His wisdom, warmth and strength of character are just a small part of what makes him truly an inspiration to mankind...

