

CHIEF ALBERT JOHN MVUMBI LUTHULI - A SERVANT OF HIS PEOPLE.  
 AN ADDRESS BY THE HON. UMTWANA MANGOSUTHU G. BUTHELEZI :  
 CHIEF EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR OF KWAZULU LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
 ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNVEILING OF THE TOMBSTONE ERECTED IN  
 MEMORY OF THE DECEASED LEADER OF THE AFRICAN PEOPLE : 23RD JULY, #972.

GROUTVILLE

Mrs. Luthuli members of the Luthuli family, Sons and Daughters of Africa, I feel I have no words adequate enough to describe vividly, what our Late Brother, Albert John Luthuli meant to his people, and what his memory should mean to his people even after death. But I can at least say without any hesitation and without any apologies to those who may disagree with my assessment of the man, that knowing Chief Luthuli as closely as I knew him, is one of the greatest privileges of my life. I thank the Almighty for his life which enriched not only those who were next of kin, but all of us who had the privilege to know him. Rarely are men born who, by the example they set for their fellowmen, enrich almost an entire Nation as he did.

In this very poor attempt at trying to describe his value to us, to South Africa and to the Human Race, you will all appreciate that because he was silenced and therefore died a banned man, a man the qualities whose character shone most, when he led a banned organisation, one is heavily circumscribed in doing this enormous task. In other words one can hardly do him justice without taking a risk each time one utters a sentence, of breaking the law. There are those who considered him a risk to peaceful co-existence in South Africa, and yet all who knew him will agree with me that if he was given a chance, his whole life would have ensured not only our peaceful co-existence, but the whole future not only of all Black People but of all White People of a Country he held so dear. He gave his whole life and paid a price few men can go out of their way to pay, as much as he did.

Here we had a man of God who truly loved all God's people and who was made to suffer merely because he dared do just that. No one can deny that he was a true Christian, and if there should be doubts about that, did Christ not say in the famous Sermon on the Mount : "How blest you are, when you suffer insults and persecution and every kind of calumny for my sake?" All that happened to him was just that. For he suffered because he kept the greatest of all Commandments of Loving one's neighbour as oneself.

Albert Luthuli gave up what in those days was a lucrative post, of being a Teacher at a Training College, and answered the call of serving his people as a Chief which meant choosing a life of penury, in order to serve his people here at Groutville Mission Station. Who amongst us can deny that was proof that his whole motivation in life was service to his people at any price? To this man all material considerations, were of secondary importance, in fact they were of no importance at all. He was in true Christian mould prepared to slave for the people he loved so dearly.

Those of us who knew him remember with reverence his battles to improve the lot of the simplest of his people not only in Groutville but throughout the Province. A battle finally extended to his whole Country.

In a Country like South Africa where one is almost defied for the mere pigmentation of one's skin, he strove to prove not only to his people but to those who strove to persecute him, that all men belonged to the one and only fine Nobility in this world, and that is to the Nobility of all men as God's children, creatures the Creator has made in His own image. The fact that he comes out triumphant in making this very point, despite all the barriers that are the lot of people of his pigmentation, is proof that this truth that will withstand the test of time.

Some people might say, particularly those who attempted to frustrate him, that they failed him, for was he not imprisoned, banned and silenced? I make bold

to say that the converse is true. These human actions he faced for the reason that he kindled a spark in men's hearts that is trampled under feet in our land, which is the knowledge that God did not create second or third class human beings, and by doing so Chief Luthuli struck fear in the hearts of all those who dehumanize and degrade other human beings for no earthly reason except that they were born with a pigmentation of the skin different from their own. For daring to stand for this he suffered the modern South African version of crucifixion.

Many of his enemies patted themselves on their backs, for they believed that they had defeated him. The proof that there was no time when he was finished or defeated was the very fact that he was kept in invisible chains until the end of his days. The very fact that he was kept in this state of apparent helplessness, is proof that he remained much more than a symbol to all who knew him, both within and outside the borders of this Country.

When again he was called upon to choose between his Chieftainship and being a servant of his people in the wider sense, he found no conflict. We remember that on paper he was deprived of his Chieftainship but up to now he remains our Chief in the very broadest sense of that term. This won him World recognition as his awards such as the Nobel Prize and others proved.

His Country was too small for his stature and she failed to recognise what he was worth to her, in terms of solving her complex problems. By not grabbing the opportunity to solve the problems of South Africa peacefully with himself as a catalyst we may have lost this chance for ever, unless there is a deep heart-search and a re-think as far as the whole attitude of White South Africa towards Blacks is concerned.

We are living in difficult times and nothing has happened so far to prove that in conducting his life as he did, that he was wrong. When the history of this Country is read particularly about his times and events of those times, coming generations will blame South Africa for having allowed an opportunity to pass to enable so noble a son to rescue his Country from her throes.

There is no evidence that there is any willingness on the part of the majority of the powerful in South Africa to heed the screams of the dispossessed and the powerless. As Lord Acton said, 'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' As a result the up and coming generations will get more and more difficult to convince that a non-violent change, is as Chief Luthuli believed possible. On the contrary when one looks at the South African scene, one is left in no doubt about the fact that violence is on the ascent, and that the chances of a non-violent change are getting scantier by day.

Whatever catastrophe overtakes South Africa whether it is now or in the distant future, South Africa will not escape the harsh judgement that things will have reached a bad pass, because what Chief Luthuli stood for was ignored at the price of political expediency.

He stands as evidence for Black patience, Black perseverance and for Black love of his fellow-human beings transcending all racial barriers. We can still hear his voice now, and South Africa still has a chance to heed the message if she was not so blinded by self-interest and sheer White avarice.

What he stood for were fundamental truths, and focus of our attention today are those fundamental truths he stood for, even more than the tombstone we are gathered here to see unveiled. May this day serve to unveil once again, even if it be for the last time, those fundamental truths for which he stood, for in them only can we seek and find our salvation and freedom for all. For without this kind of Freedom there will never be real freedom even for those who wield physical power in our land.

When we look at his whole life we realise that what the late Mr. Robert Kennedy meant when he said in 1966 :

"MORAL COURAGE IS A RARER COMMODITY THAN BRAVERY IN BATTLE OR GREAT INTELLIGENCE. YET IT IS ONE ESSENTIAL, VITAL QUALITY FOR THOSE WHO SEEK TO CHANGE A WORLD WHICH YIELDS MOST PAINFULLY TO CHANGE."

Let us realise that if we find ourselves hemmed in by all sorts of barriers and edicts in South Africa, we can at least follow in Albert John Mvumbi Luthuli by having or cultivating moral courage such as he had in abundance.

INKOSI'SIKELELI AFRIKA . FREEDOM IN OUR LIFETIME.