



“The Mark of a Great Leader”

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Greetings & thanks:

- Excellencies, Senators, Members of Parliament, distinguished guests, ...
 - I am honored to be with you
 - Thank you for making time from busy lives
- Darlene & Christian Embassy
 - Thank you for hosting this event
 - Hospitality to me

Summary: Faith on my work among the poor and my sense of the ultimate mark of a great leader

- Movement from:
 - Caricature images of poverty
 - To compassion & understanding
 - To justice

Scripture: Jeremiah 22:15b. *“Did not your father **eat and drink** (too much), and **do justice** (Mishpat) and **righteousness** (tsēdaqah)? Then it was well with him. 16. “He **pled** (diyn) **the cause** of the **afflicted** (‘aniy/oppressed) and **needy** (‘ebyown/Dependant); then it was well. **Is not that what it means to know Me?**” Declares the LORD.*

- For me this is the Word of the Lord
- For you, maybe a good read or good word

Introduction:

- I am Canadian of Lebanese/Irish descent
- Raymond Michael Tobias, my Lebanese grandfather, my Jiddi, came to Canada in 1896 with his father and young bride
- She died soon after arriving
- At about 21 he returned to Lebanon and is pledged in marriage to Amelia Stephens who is 1 year old at the time. She was sent to Canada in 1912 to meet and marry her husband
- Couldn’t get paper for her so he smuggled her into the country in the false bottom of a wagon
- I am the descendant of good middle eastern illegal immigrants
 - I think about my Sitti/sitto as I hear about Syrian Refugees arriving

Ministry Background:

- I have worked with people living with poverty for over 40 years
- That makes me a most fortunate and blessed man
 - I cannot imagine choosing a better life
 - I am one of the earth’s fortunate few who get to love and enjoy their work

Caricatures: 40+ years ago

- I used to think poverty was about money
 - You had it and were not poor or you didn't and you were poor
 - Poverty has little to do with the possession of the poor
 - No word in the scriptures that means to lack money
- I had all the standard middle class caricature images of the poor:
 - I was the product of an immigrant family with insane work ethic
 - Started work at 11
 - Poor were:
 - Lazy...
 - Bad choices...
 - Just working the system....
 - Just pull yourself up by the boot straps
 - Problem with Caricatures is there is always enough evidence to re-enforce your views; especially if you don't take a second look

To Compassion and Understanding:

That view began to change when I worked in the south end of Saint John almost 40 years ago.

Hired to build bridges between the church and the neighbourhood

- Meet the neediest first
- First women I met just kept yelling/screaming at me.
 - Asked if I would do a Bible study for her friends
 - Asked on what?
 - How to be a Christian
 - Got to the study & 15/17 women in the room had a history of abuse
 - Asked my denomination for resources. Nothing.
 - Asked Family services and they told me to stay away from them because men hurt them
 - Women agreed but suggested therefor I better stick about and help
 - Other engagements with child prostitutes, throw away youth, abandoned seniors and the severely disabled homeless shattered preconceived prejudices.

This compelled me towards compassionate involvements.

- Wondered if my faith tradition had anything to speak into the issue
- If found little help in my denomination, its schools or its leadership
 - I had to self-educate
- I didn't know
 - 2,000 vs of Scripture relating to the poor and poverty
 - Didn't know they spoke clearly on behalf of the poor and oppressed
 - Weighted with a favourable view of the poor
 - Responsibility with society and balanced with individual responsibility
 - Opposed to the societal view and caricatures
 - Opposed the Church which sided with society against its own scriptures
 - Didn't know about the breadth of language: The "poors"
 - Oppressed (personal/societal)
 - Infirm, Physical to mental and emotional
 - Famished, lack of food and jobs
 - Dependent, Welfare and workfare
 - Dispossessed; lost their stake hold and right

- o Didn't know about widows, orphans & aliens (200+ refs to aliens)
- o Didn't know the multitudes who followed Jesus were poor and powerless
 - Didn't see his repeated call to compassionate living
 - Paul taught "work so you have to give away"
- In fact there was this rich body of literature, remarkably different from much of what I had learned about faith and which was extremely helpful to my work.

My reading deepened and strengthen my compulsions to invest in compassion activities

- Learned how to develop appropriate responses, programs and protocols
 - o Drop ins
 - o Health services for Street involved youth
 - o Computer literacy for inner city youth on the wrong side of the digital divide
 - o Employment training and opportunities for youth and new immigrants
 - o Revised how we delivered service to better protect dignity of people
 - o Formation of an informal network of street and poverty workers across the nation. Self-training.
 - o Learned how to get church people and people of substance to invest in compassion

To Justice:

However of late I have come to know: compassion is not enough.

- Not that compassionate involvement is wrong
 - o Deeply important for the wellbeing of a civil society
- Rather compassion and compassionate involvements are not enough
 - o If I were starting over today, I would invest the same energy studying and working for justice
 - o Not to take away from the past
 - o I am not sure we, as a society, were ready to hear words about justice 30-40 years ago
- Define: When I say justice...
 - o Not about law and order
 - o Justice ensures the goods and services of a nation are used to the benefit of all the people
 - o Compassion feeds the poor and justice ask why the poor need to be fed
 - o Compassion is the ambulance service at the bottom of a cliff
 - Justice works to install guard rails
 - o Compassion lessens the impact of poverty
 - Justice works to eliminate poverty
 - o Always aspirational
- Scriptures call for justice for the quartet of the vulnerable
 - Widows, orphans, aliens and variety of people living with poverty
 - o Hebrew Christian Scriptures do not define justice
 - The Law says what should and should not happen
 - Do prey on the weak
 - Prophets admonish people for not being with the vulnerable

That leads me to:

- The mark of a great Nations is found in its capacity to care and provide for its most vulnerable citizens
 - o In Canada:

- Children who are the products of abusive orphanages and foster care systems
 - First nations people who still fight for treaty rights, the resolution of the pain of the residential school system and much more
 - Psychiatric consumers who are left homeless and shelterless
 - Great nation would have a national housing policy
 - Assurance no one worked for less than one can live on
 - Ensure the rights of marginalized peoples and refugees
 - Committed to ending Child poverty
 - Committed to mitigating the gap between the richest and poorest citizen
- o Again we can debate what this looks like and we can recognize it is aspirational but where we are in such matters is a strong indication of our greatness
- By extension mark of a great leader is seen in the leader's investment to ensuring the most vulnerable in the society are not left behind and have enough
- To King Josiah of Ancient Israel
 - o Who models: great leadership for me
- Josiah:
 - o Ate and drank: maybe too much!
 - Partied/banqueted; enjoyed his wealth and position.
 - o Did justice: (Mishpat)
 - Ensured the legal system delivered systemic/national justice
 - Committed to the quartet of the vulnerable (widows, orphans, aliens, poor)
 - o Did Righteousness: personal justice (tsēdaqah)
 - Did not simply just ensure the rights of the vulnerable under the law
 - Lived justly himself
 - Kings were using people without pay. He paid.
 - Not just a king: has business interests. He was honorable
 - Fair scales
 - Not over charging for good and services
 - Care for the disabled
 - Personal investment in the safety of the weak
 - Treated all people with dignity
 - Compassionate and charitable
 - o Pled the cause:
 - Of the afflicted (Aniy/oppressed) and the needy (Ebyown/Dependant)
 - Together this is the full range of people trapped in poverty
 - Pled: Legal term/advocated
 - Not just insured justice himself
 - Not just acted justly
 - Pled the cause of the people who were left behind

From coast to coast in Canada and from Canada to all corners of the earth we need compassionate care givers who personally invest themselves in the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. That's me.

And we need great leaders who work to establish just laws and just practices so that our most vulnerable citizens can enjoy a full and just participation within our societies...that's your job.

In fairness it is all our jobs....
Thank you and God bless.