

Eulogy By Allan Boesak

19 June 2020

Good afternoon everyone,

From the bottom of my heart and that of my family our deepest condolences with the passing of Mrs. Cynthia Fraser. A truly, amazingly, wonderful person and I am so grateful to God that I had the chance to get to know her, her husband and the family over these many years. To every one of her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and the family please accept our condolences.

From the gospel of Matthew there is a verse, chapter 25 verse 23 that says, where Jesus speaks and says, "well done good and faithful servant. Over little were you faithful, over much I shall appoint you". When I wrote to the family, I quoted that verse because it is so true of her. In my conversation with Geraldine, she mentioned that her mom comes from a very small place called Klipfontein. Who knows Klipfontein? Who talks about Klipfontein? There's this thing about small places in our country and that thing is that the smallest places may be the most forgettable places but they produce the most unforgettable people. It's true in her life.

You've heard about how from a young age she knew that something was going on, but she also knew that she had to do something about what was going on. That work with the fire workers union selling Christmas stamps, I remember those Christmas stamps from my youth but the Christmas stamps that I got did not come with political pamphlets like hers. Riling up the people as they prepare for Christmas, knowing that something had to be done about the plight of our people and working with the union was her way of doing that. She stood in the tradition of those Christian activists like Albert John Mvumbi Luthuli who said, "I am in congress because I am a Christian and I go into these battles taking my Christian faith with me", that was Cynthia Fraser. Albert Luthuli himself comes from Groutville, at least he was born close on a mission station close to Bulawayo, but he grew up in Groutville. She comes from Klipfontein. Small places, forgettable places produce the most unforgettable people.

My relationship with her and her family came through their commitment and our commitment to the struggle. She came talking to me about how to raise funds for that struggle. Above ground and underground, always taking that extra risk doing something for the community was okay. Doing something for the underground brought a risk but she took that risk. For me she became in so many ways the epitome of what we would come to call our struggle mothers. She was a struggle mother not just because her children were in the struggle but she became a struggle mother because she took in those activists who took those very serious chances. She protected them, fed them, helped them. She counselled them. She admonished them, she scolded them, as if they were her own children because the struggle made them her children. She was at every trial in support of those children. To stand by their mothers and if the mothers could not be there, for one or other reason, to stand in as their mother because she knew that's what they needed. There were times that the slogans were not enough, you needed somebody to hold your hand, you needed somebody to encourage you, you needed somebody to say I love you and mean it. That was Cynthia Fraser.

You know that statue, down at the bottom of Adderley street? that they say is the statue of the woman that they call Jan Van Riebeek's wife, Maria de la Queillierie. I was always thinking those statues and that statue should be taken down, toppled and replaced with a statue of our struggle mothers. And I wish that I would be alive to see that happen. That's what she awakens in all of us and that would honour the struggle mothers of the Western Cape.

The last time I visited her was when she summoned me to come and pray for her. Oh I knew she thought it was a request but I knew it was a summons. When Cynthia Fraser called you to come and pray for her you don't say no, you go. So, I did, go. And we did pray that day and we talked a lot. But she wanted also to share with me her anger about what was going on. About how the movement was losing its way she said, and losing at the same time the trust of the people. About how corruption and dishonesty and entitlement was taking and eating away at the soul of the movement, she wanted to talk about that. She wanted to talk about the selective memory about the struggle, she was upset because it looked to her that in the eyes of some people, some in high places as if the people in the Western Cape were not really part of the struggle. As if we did not march, as if we did not protest, as if we did not smell the tear gas, as if we were not shamboked, as if we were not shot at, as if we did not go to prison, as if we were not tortured. As if we did not die for the struggle and for the future. It upset her. But she was right, and she said it because she loved the movement and she could say it because she had the credentials. Because she was faithful in all of the little things that matter, God will uplift her and appoint her over much more than what she had been able to do in her life. That's what the text says and this text comes as the climax of Jesus's final teachings to his disciples. And within the context of those unforgettable words of God's final judgement where Jesus says, "God will judge people and the nations", and what are those criteria that God will use? This: "I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was naked and you clothed me, I was a stranger and you took me in, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me". And then they will ask the bible says, "when did we do all of this? when did we see you hungry and tired and sick and in prison? And Jesus will say in as much as you did this to the least of these who are my family, you have done it to me."

Well, there is not a single thing in that list that Cynthia did not do. So, I say again, right now I can see her standing next to Jesus, Arthur waiting for her to finish that conversation. How long it will last? I don't know and Jesus doesn't know either but at the end of that conversation Jesus will say, "well done good and faithful servant, over little, the little that I gave you to do you were faithful, over much I will appoint you". And she will stand and preside over this legacy and each of you children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who have so much now to cling to. Much more than the words, much more than the biscuits, much more than the fish you offered me when I came to see her, hotnots vissie it was that day. Toe lag ons nou oor hotnot vissies en sy sê vir my "kan ons dit nog sê?" "Ja ons kan dit nog sê. Hotnot vissies".

Above all of that, here is this legacy, and even though that statue might come it will never say enough. But what we do, that will be the much over which she will preside.

God Bless you all today and every day.