

Dominion of Justice- Psalm 72

By Rev. Cathy Russell Aug 21, 2011

MYSTERY FACE #1 (SIR LEONARD TILLEY)

Do you know this face? Neither did I, before this week, but this distinguished looking gentleman had a very important role to play in the formation of this country. This is a photograph of Sir Leonard Tilley, pharmacist, family man, faithful Anglican, twice elected Premier of New Brunswick, and Father of Confederation.

Leonard Tilley had two issues which dominated his political life, temperance and confederation. Now temperance advocates may have the reputation of being prim kill joys today, but in the mid-1800s, there was little doubt that dirt cheap rum-sometimes it was even provided for free to labourers by their employers- was a serious social problem. Many, including Tilley, saw firsthand the connection between bargain basement liquor, poverty and all kinds of social ills- especially for the most vulnerable-women and children. For Tilley and many others it was not just a moral issue, but a justice issue as well. Meanwhile the Canadian government was happy to rake in the cash in the form of duties on liquor sales. Tilley achieved his goal of temperance briefly in 1864, only to have the Lt. Governor of NB call for another election a year later which he and the Liberals lost-narrowly.

Tilley's other more successful cause was a Canadian confederation, not just between the maritime colonies, but with Quebec and Ontario as well. Having lost on prohibition in 1865, he was re-elected in 1866 by a populace who had decided that confederation would be a good thing if it meant an end to the fenian raids originating in the US.

In Dec. of that year, as the Westminster Conference finalized the British North American Act Tilley helped to write, no agreement could be reached on what the new United Canada should be called. Here in a letter written by Sir Leonard's son, we hear about his father's moment of inspiration.

The next morning, as was Sir Leonard's custom, he read a chapter from the Bible, and that particular morning he read Psalm Seventy-two. When reading verse eight of the said Psalm—*He shall have Dominion also from sea to sea*—the thought occurred to him, what a splendid name to give Canada. When he went back to the sitting of the

convention that morning he suggested the word “Dominion,” which was agreed to, and Canada was called the “Dominion of Canada.”

So this face, this committed disciple, this Leonard Tilley of New Brunswick is responsible for the historic name of our country the Dominion of Canada- and this name came to Leonard Tilley, spoke to him I think you could say, from the scriptures, from the psalm we have heard this morning- psalm 72.

MYSTERY FACE #2 (KING DAVID)

Do you know this face? This is the face of the most famous and beloved kings of Israel- David, son of Jesse, grandson of Ruth the Moabite, pictured here with his harp. Over 73 psalms are directly attributed to King David, including the source of Leonard Tilley’s inspiration psalm 72. David had lived a full and eventful life, right from the time he was anointed by Samuel as God’s chosen when he was still a shepherd boy looking after the family flock. His career path included slaying a Philistine giant, leading a band of outlaws on the run from King Saul, receiving the crown of Judah and later Israel, subduing Israel’s enemies as their king, conceiving a child with Bathsheba and then arranging for the death of her husband.

Psalm 72 has written above it in what is called the superscription- *Prayer for Guidance and Support of the King*- in this case “the king” indicates Solomon, David’s son and Successor to the throne of Israel. So as we hear this psalm we are invited to imagine David, elderly, wise, an experienced soldier and a gifted musician, a man who knows firsthand both power and the misuse of power, offering a last blessing and prayer for his son Solomon who is about to assume the crown and all the responsibility that comes with it. We are invited to hear the psalm delivered with all the authority of David’s greatest king in the twilight of his reign.

And for what does this great ruler and leader of the nation pray for? How does he spend the last of his political capital, what challenge does he leave to those who would come after him? He prays for God to make the king just. He leaves the challenges of ensuring justice for the poor, righteousness for the needy, deliverance for the oppressed. God’s anointed king may have a grand dominion stretching from sea to sea, he may receive tribute from the rich and the powerful, but the foundation of that dominion and the reign of that king is to be built on meeting responsibilities to the forgotten and the powerless. Meeting these responsibilities to the vulnerable comes first, and any success for the dominion and the ruler of the dominion flows from out of this.

I wonder if it was the spirit of the whole of this psalm- the connection between a strong God-fearing land and a just and compassionate government, not just the line about the “dominion from sea to sea” that made such an impression on the Premier of New Brunswick on that fateful morning in 1866. Given Leonard Tilley’s own commitment to Christ and the kingdom of God on earth it seems likely.

MYSTERY FACE #3 Do you know this face? **MYSTERY FACE #4** What about this one? **MYSTERY FACE # 5** Or this one? **MYSTERY FACE # 6 (JESUS)** I know you know this one. It’s a Jewish face, a face stepped in the traditions and teachings of Israel, including the recurring theme of justice and right relationship, not only in the psalms, but in the histories and the prophets, right through the Older Testament. In fact, Jesus says if you want to see my face, if you want to recognise me in the world, then you will find me in the faces of the poor, the needy and the oppressed. “Whatever you did to the least of these, whenever you gave food to the hungry, or visited the sick or in prison, or clothed the naked, you did it to me.”

There are many people who like to stress the claim that the dominion of Canada was founded as a Christian nation, and that Christian principles need to be at the heart of how we are led and governed. If we take that claim at all seriously, then how can we avoid this most Christian principle of addressing the needs of the most vulnerable, even the most despised- the ones on the ash heap of life among us? Justice- and not just the law and order kind, the social is a fundamental Christian principle.

(MYSTERY FACE #7 Rick Tobias) One last face to show you- this is Rick Tobias President and CEO of the Yonge St. Mission in Toronto. He is a different brand of Christian than the typical left-liberal United Church advocate for justice, and yet he has a strong, even radical commitment to social change. In a stirring and challenging piece written for Citizens for Public Justice he names the marks of a great nation and great leaders highlighted by Psalm 72. One of those is that great nations and great leaders recognise that the poor are precious to God, and so are to be precious to us as well.

To God, the poor are precious. Reflecting God’s heart, a great leader also considers the poor to be precious. Psalm 72 is about revealing God’s heart, and God sees the poor as people of worth, people with a valuable contribution to make to the good of the nation.

We rise during worship and sing about the precious blood of Jesus, while Jesus is weeping about the precious blood of the poor. He values the poor, and he has taught

this clearly: regardless of what we may sing, when we exploit the poor, or slander them, or punish them, or simply ignore them, we do it all to Christ. The people we serve are precious to God; on what basis dare we be arrogant or feel superior?

Do we want to know these precious people? Do we want to hear their stories, and share their struggles? Do we want to break bread with them? Pray with them, defend them, advocate for them and with them? Do we, do I, do you?

Answering these questions says a lot about how much we really want to be a dominion of God, how much we really want to be leaders of real worth. Answering these questions says a lot about how seriously we take the king of Israel's prayer for public justice in psalm 72. It says something about how much we really want to see the face of Jesus.

St Matthew's has the privilege of a location where it is easy to see the face of Jesus in the face of the poor and the needy. You can see the face of Jesus every Tuesday, and one Saturday a month downstairs during our food distribution ministry. It's a good start, it's more than a lot of churches would do. But we can still grow in this ministry, and I hope our FOCIS Visioning Process a process that asks questions about who are our neighbours, what do they need from us, what do we need from them, will help us do just that.

May the prayers of David and the commands of Jesus be our guiding light, and our founding principles. Thanks be to God, AMEN.

Holy God, you are the Creator of all that is good. You fill this world with an abundance beyond measure, more than enough for each person on this planet. You make yourself known to us in the history of Israel, and in Christ Jesus as a God of justice and liberation, compassion and wholeness. We bless you and thank you for your goodness to us.

And yet something has gone wrong. We see a world where many are deprived, even unto death. A world where much of your creation is poisoned or paved over, a world where the life you give us is treated with contempt. A world where good people suffer terrible tragedy.

God of goodness, we bring our burdens to you.

We pray for the world- for those in the deadly grip of famine in Eastern Africa. We give thanks for the generosity of the world community, including Canada in responding to this latest crises, and ask that our gifts would save lives and bring hope. We pray for nations suffering internal violence and chaos- for Afghanistan, for Lybia, for Syria, for Israel/Palestine. We pray for all those in our armed forces who risk life and limb every day far away from home and the ones they love.

God of goodness, we bring our burdens to you.

We pray for our own nation of Canada. We give thanks for the privileges we enjoy. May we and our leaders- whatever their party or affiliation be ever mindful of our obligations to the poor and vulnerable in our midst.

God of goodness we bring our burdens to you.

We pray for our own church family of St. Matthew's, and our ministry to and with this community. We pray for our upcoming FOCIS Visioning Process, for the Rev. Jackie Harper who will facilitate and all those who will participate in discerning where you are calling us to go, and how we might get there. We pray for all those we know who are in need of your care and compassion.

For Debbie and Matthew Robichaud in the loss of Tom, beloved husband and father. For the staff of St. Matthew's who have lost a valued and trusted colleague. For the community of St. Matthew's who have lost a hard working and conscientious employee.

God of goodness, we bring our burdens to you.

Blessed and Holy God, we offer all these prayers to you trusting in your goodness, mercy and wisdom, through the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN.

Holy God

We are reminded that we never know what a day may bring, only that the hour for serving is always present. Surrounded by your love, in the midst of one another, we offer thanks for the life and service of Tom Robichaud our custodian. We pray for his family- especially his wife

Debbie and their son Matthew, who only weeks ago lost a father and grandfather. Give them and us the consolation of your healing presence in this life, and the promise of a new life with you, when this life, however long, comes to an end. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who rose from the dead, and who taught us to pray as one family, saying OUR FATHER...