

2/6/97 Nat'l Prayer Luncheon

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT NATIONAL PRAYER LUNCHEON

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much. Tony is right -- I have had three free meals. (Laughter.) I'll be back later if you invite me again.

I am delighted to join you at this lunch. I was talking with Susan Baker because she and I were also on the program of the lunch in 1994. I had to ask her what year it was. I couldn't recall exactly, but I think that she was right. And so it is a particular pleasure to return.

I want to thank Tony and Janet Hall for their work and their example, their witness, and for the leadership that they both give in their own ways, bringing to our attention many issues and problems that people of faith need to address.

I'm always grateful to be anywhere that Whitley Phipps (sp) sings. I thought that note was going to go on forever. (Laughter.) And I am so pleased that you and your wife can be with us, and that you do stop people on airplanes or anywhere else to spread a word of grace and hope, and I am grateful for that.

I want to thank Mr. and Mrs. Dunham (phonetic) for your being here and for your word of prayer and support. And I'm particularly pleased that President Museveni and Mrs. Museveni can be with us. I've had the chance just today to talk particularly with Janet, and I know how much being here means to them. And I also want them to know how much their being here means to us. We are very grateful that you would join us. (Applause.)

I was originally invited to respond to the President's remarks. (Laughter.) And I am very pleased to do so by merely standing up and saying amen. (Laughter.) But I think that I have to do a little more for my lunch than that.

So let me, if I could, pick up where both Presidents ended -- our President, my husband, this morning and the President of Uganda at this lunch -- because in their ways, from their different perspectives, but bearing the burdens of leadership, they come before us to share what is on their hearts.

This morning I had no idea what my husband was going to say. I saw him early this morning flipping through some prepared remarks that had been given to him. And then in the car on our way here from the White House, I saw him discarding them page by page and, as anyone who is the spouse of anyone in public life -- a preacher, a member of Congress, a President or a business executive -- you know what it feels like when you watch your husband or wife stand up and you have no idea what is about to come out. (Laughter.) So you are as interested and sometimes as amazed as anyone else in the audience.

And I felt this morning that when our President talked about the breach and what it meant to repair that, that certainly I felt he was talking directly to me. And I hope others in the audience felt the same way, particularly after we had heard Dr. Carson's challenge and learned something of his life and his faith journey. I think each of us could in the quiet of our own heart consider breaches we had caused, that we had seen and left unrepaired, and to recognize how important it is for all of us to be repairers.

I thought about it particularly because in addition to the groups that my husband asked us to think about as being in the breach -- the poor, those in other countries, on great continents like Africa, and those who are officially in public life and in the media -- I would add all the rest of us in a great, large, encompassing group.

And speaking just for myself, I know that since I was last here at this lunch in 1994, I have felt often as though I were thrown into a breach and I have felt on other times, I wish to push someone into a breach. (Laughter.) And on both types of occasions, it didn't take long for me to realize what great damage I would do to myself were I either to slip in or to push toward that breach; and that instead, part of the challenge of living any life -- but particularly a life in the public arena -- is constantly to ask oneself, what can I do to repair -- not to tear down, not to give in to one's worst impulses, not to turn one's back on every Biblical injunction and Sunday school lesson that one had been taught -- but to pick oneself up and get about the business of repairing.

And then today at lunch, we heard some points about how that repair can be done -- in thinking about what President Museveni told us, thinking about what really are very simple, timeless lessons -- how do we love our neighbor? I occasionally taught Sunday school back in Little Rock. I used to teach a class of adults -- a lot of whom had different points of view and experiences and all kinds of backgrounds to bring to this class. And every year, we used to revisit what it meant to love one's neighbor. And I remember very well how we suddenly realized that that was something you had to think about every single day and how it was practically impossible even to imagine if one did not also love oneself. And as I was listening to the litmus test about loving all people, I have to confess that I was running through in my mind some of those whom I find very hard to love.

Last night when I was at the dinner with Tony and Janet and others who are here, where we spoke with one another about some of the differences that people of faith have in the political arena, I had a man say to me, Mrs. Clinton, I want your forgiveness because for the last four years I have worked very hard to destroy you. And I was taken aback. And he went on to say,

then I realized that my faith in my head was not connected to my heart.

And I said to him, you know, I very much appreciate your saying this, and I certainly will remember forever that you have, and of course I forgive you.

I walked away from that and visited the other people in the room and I went home and thought about it. And I thought, you know, I don't know this man. I had never met him before. But what I should have said is, I don't know you and I don't know anything about you, but I want you to forgive me also, because I am sure that in my moments of frustration and anger, I have said terrible things about people like you and I've thought even worse. But I didn't say that. So I say it now.

If he's here or if anyone else is here, because we have, in our country, spent a lot of time in the last several years demonizing people with whom we do not agree politically. I've heard Tony Hall say a dozen times he was often told he could not be both a Democrat and a Christian. He says it with his good humor, but I know how much that can hurt. And, of course, I have to confess that it's crossed my mind that you could not be a Republican and a Christian from time to time. (Laughter.)

But I hope that that breach, as wide as it has been, is beginning to close because of leaders like Tony and others. We all need to be reminded of the parables from the New Testament and particularly the Good Samaritan, which I think can always be looked at from so many different perspectives because, after all, every one of us walks away from somebody nearly every day who is hurting because we don't have time, we don't want to be involved, we don't think we can help. And it doesn't have to be someone lying in a ditch. It can be a young child who needs your time and you say you don't have it. It can be someone who works for you and you know is going through a hard time, but you don't want to get involved. It can be an aimless person whose plight comes to your attention, but you're not the person to help.

Because I travel so much, I see many people like that. And I have to confess, some I try to help and others I, too, walk away from. But it's another one of those reminders that our faith is best evidenced by what we do.

Then the President talked about how so many of us in act in ways that we justify to ourselves and others because we are absolutely convinced we are doing whatever we believe in on behalf of God. People of faith, I think especially, have to be humble whenever we think that, to catch ourselves and be honest enough to say, I think that what I'm doing is on behalf of God; I believe this is what I am called to do; but to know that that is a human judgment, and always to be open to looking at it from a different perspective.

And, finally, the examples of transformation -- thank heavens for them. It's always interesting to me as I read the Bible, and I can remember from years ago being in Sunday School classes, and wondering, of all the people in the world, why would God choose some of those who He chose to carry out His mission on this Earth? Even heroes of the Bible -- people like David -- hardly led a blameless life. Even heroes of the New Testament, like Paul -- we know

what he did as Saul. We know how hard he struggled even after he was transformed to quell his pride and his ambition in the service of Christ.

It's a lesson to all of us, but, yes, faith and following the example of Christ can lead to transformation. But even after transformation we have to be humble, and we have to work hard to make sure we don't elevate ourselves now that we have been transformed.

When I was writing my book, *It Takes A Village*, I wanted very much to write about the role that religion plays and that I think should play in raising children. And it was a struggle because the editors with whom I was working said to me, you know, most people in America are just not very religious and it would just take too long to try to explain why for you this is an important part of raising a child and having been raised yourself. And I struggled away to write something down anyway, and I would send pages of the draft in and comments would come back, and very often the comments were along the lines, you can't refer in this passage where you're talking about the effects of divorce to King Solomon because very few people who read even will know who King Solomon is. You can't throw in this aside about David or talk about this parable because most people won't know what you're talking about.

And I would struggle along and labor along and come back with another draft and I'd say, well, how about this? And we eventually worked it out so that I could say what I wanted to say. But what struck me then, forcefully, is that if indeed we are living in a country where very few people even know who King Solomon or King David is, and don't know the story of Saul's transformation into Paul, then a lot of us who argue with one another over matters of faith or politics are really wasting a lot of time and energy, because there are millions and millions of people right here in America who have not heard the word and who have not even, more importantly, seen us act in such a way that opens their hearts to wanting to hear the word.

So what I hope is that as we work to be repairers of the breach we take to heart what two Presidents have told us -- two men who in their own ways have tried to do just that -- and that we do more on behalf of the poor, because we all know that Jesus spoke more of the poor than anything else; that we do more to connect ourselves with people around the world, to see them as God's creations, to respect them and work with them; and that we lift up our political leaders and members of the press, hoping that by our prayers they, too, will be repairers of the breach; but that ultimately we take responsibility for all the breaches in our own lives; and that we do pray for guidance and strength, courage where needed, to repair the breaches in our own hearts and minds.

That's what I think we are called to do, and it is the hardest task of all.

I thank you for coming together, on this national day of prayer, to pray for those in authority. And I hope you will join me in praying for all the rest of us as well. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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