

## The Collect for the Last Sunday after the Epiphany

Almighty God, who gave to your servant Janani Luwum and his Companions boldness to confess the Name of our Savior Jesus Christ before the rulers of this world, and courage to die for this faith: Grant that we may always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us, and to suffer gladly for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Matthew 17:1-9 The Transfiguration

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with Him I am well pleased; listen to Him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself, alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."



## Sermon by Rev. Dr. Aloha Smith **Archbishop Janani Luwum 1922-1977**

### A Martyr for the Sake of Christ

- Last Friday was the Commemoration in honor of Janani Luwum, Archbishop of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Bogo-Zaire. He was murdered, along with two other government officials on the orders of Idi Amin, general since 1971 and military President of Uganda, who had established himself as the total ruler of the country. He had the reputation as one of the most brutal dictators in the known world, up until that time. When Anglican missionaries in the

19th century began to establish Christian churches and to convert people to the faith, this country in Africa was known as the jewel of Christianity on the continent. Great teaching and missionary work abounded, and the people prospered with the generosity of the church and its outreach to the poor. The Anglican world was proud of Christianity in the country, but all that changed with the rise of Amin (c1925-2003).

- Whether Idi Amin wanted to change the country's religion to Islam, or he believed that Muslims would be easier to control, he simply included all Christians in his vast enemy list and began to persecute them. Always suspicious of the population, he only allowed members of his own tribe to have access to him.
- Amin always appeared in full military dress, his chest bristling with medals and honors many invented by himself. For example, when he heard about the English Victoria Cross and realized he was not eligible to receive it, he made up a new decoration for his outfit and called it "the Victorious Cross".
- All he considered his enemies, he eliminated, especially Christians, especially Christian leaders.
- But Janani Luwum, who became a Christian in 1948, stood up to him. He rescued people from prisons and jails. He made public appearances and sermons denouncing Amin's takeover as an impact on the most impoverished. But, when a preacher was shot for reading a Psalm on the radio, people were terribly afraid, and began to leave the Church. Terror ruled in the land. There was an unproven rumor that Amin was a cannibal and served his enemies to his friends at dinner parties, but no one has stepped forward to prove it.
- Janani Luwum became a convert to Christianity when he was 26, and became Archbishop of the area of Uganda, including Rwanda, Burundi and Bogo-Zaire from 1974 to his death in 1977. He increasingly saw the danger from Amin's rule that he and his people were in, but famously said, "If I, the shepherd, flee, what will happen to the sheep?"
- Eventually, it had to end. The story went out that Archbishop Luwum and two other officials had been detained and put in a car. And they, attempting to escape, had tried to overpower the

driver, and crashing, killing all three.

- However, when Janani's body was returned to his family village, they discovered it was full of bullet holes. He had been murdered on Amin's orders.
- On the front of Westminster Abbey today, he is commemorated with a statue along with two other 20<sup>th</sup> century martyrs, and people make pilgrimages along the route of his last fatal journey.
- Lwum's courage and martyrdom energized Christian Ugandans to return to the church in spite of the danger.
- As for Idi Amin, a losing war with Tanzania ended his career. He was exiled in Saudi Arabia and died in 2003. According to Human Rights Watch, killed between 100,000 to 500,000 of his own people during his reign of terror.
- Some of this all came home to me when I was in seminary in Montreal. We students had a visit with Patrice Njojo, then present Bishop of Bogo-Zaire and his predecessor, missionary Bishop Philip Ridsdale. They told us something of this story as they answered questions and conferred together. The interesting thing was that Bp. Ridsdale was not confident in his French, and Bp. Njojo, who had studied in Montreal, was not too comfortable with English, so they talked to each other in Swahili, one of the main trade languages of Africa. This was a source of those of us who also struggled with French as native English speakers living in the tense political situation in Quebec at that time.
- Bp. Njojo told of the thousands of Ugandan refugees who had poured into Bobo-Zaire in the seventies who had found help in the French Anglican Church there. But the Ugandans spoke English and were greatly helped by the BCP, which had been translated in French Canada, and given to French-speaking people around the world. A way to learn a new language with the Book of Common Prayer as a textbook!
- Perhaps the overwhelming colonization of Africa by Europeans became somewhat redeemed by this exchange.

- This brings me to the meaning of transfiguration as we hear it in the Gospel.
- It is not transformation, like pulling a rabbit out of a hat - now you see it, now you don't!
- It is not a change of form, intent, or purpose. It is not a trick. It is the back story, it is the whole story, the truth unfolded before our eyes. Jesus is transfigured, so those disciples could see who He really was. It is a picture of the truth of who He really is.
- We can see through means of a book in our own language, a work of others given to us for a mountaintop experience. We can see through the life of a modern martyr like Janani Luwum, what taking up our Cross might mean; might become for us. We can see with our own eyes the whole truth of the Love of Christ for our world and everyone in it.

As Peter's sermon says,

*"You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place,  
until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."*

Amen? Amen.