

Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming and is now here ...  
- John 5:25

Uganda under the military dictator General Idi Amin Dada Oumee was a scary place. Amin came into prominence during the rule of Milton Obote. Obote himself was no peaceful democrat. He was no angel, period. He was an autocrat, who harboured ambitions of being President for Life. He had institute a one-party state when he removed the Kabaka of the Baganda as the Head of State, in 1967, and assumed power as Executive President in 1967. Amin, a lowly officer, received rapid promotion under Obote, and became Obote's enforcer in chief. The Kabaka went into exile, and many Baganda fled.

In January 1971, while Obote was attending a Commonwealth Conference idi Amin staged a peaceful coup d'etat, and established a military dictatorship. At first widely welcome considering Obote's excesses. But many had not reckoned with the brutality of an uneducated man in arms. He soon presided over a reign of terror throughout Uganda. He packed the army, security and intelligence services with the Nubian minority He systematically continued Obote's policy of ethnicisation of Uganda, and set one tribe against another, dishing out favours according to ethnic affiliation. He was distrustful of the educated classes, and as a convert to Islam, was thought to privilege the minority Moslem religion. In fact, it was alleged that he was driving a policy of Islamicisation of Uganda.

Among the intellectuals and Ugandan nationalists who disappeared and were murdered by state operatives were Ali Picho and the Hon Alex Ajera. The Vice Chancellor of Makerere University was also executed, and many were languishing in prisons. Not much notice was taken when Amin gave orders for the genocide of an entire village where Milton Obote originated from, but then the world was aroused to action when some 55 000 Asian Ugandans were expelled, taking with them only what they could fit into their suitcases. These were largely small-scale shopkeepers and traders forced to start a new life in Europe and North America with barely none of their worldly possessions. At the same time as there was terror at home. Amin was not immune from adventures and bravado on the international scale. When an Israeli plane hijacked by Palestinians landed at Entebbe Airport, the Israelis acted and killed the terrorists and reclaimed the aircraft. A preacher, reading a Psalm in a radio broadcast, was frog-marched out of the studio, and shot and killed – so severe was the man's anti-semitism!. When Amin ventured into war with neighbouring Tanzania, an army of Ugandan exiles and Tanzanian troops repulsed this venture into war.

It was precisely at such dangerous times that Janani Jakaliya Luwum became Archbishop and Primate of Uganda, Burundi Rwanda and Zaire in 1974 was thrust into the spotlight of national politics and church life in Uganda. He had been bishop of the remote northern diocese based in Gulu on the border with Sudan. He had a reputation as a fierce evangelist and a charismatic preacher. Indeed he began life in

a non-Christian home. His father was a convert to Christianity, and in 1948, he too became a Christian while he was a schoolteacher. He soon devoted himself to evangelism, attended theological college and became a catechist. After some years he went back to College and prepared for the ordained ministry. He was ordained priest in 1956. With some further education at the London Divinity School he went back to Nigeria as a lecturer at his seminary. Within a short while he became General secretary of the Church based in Kampala, and three years later became Bishop of Northern Uganda in 1969. He was enthroned at a ceremony attended, ironically, by both President Milton Obote and Idi Amin as Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces,

Without doubt to be a church leader in Uganda those days both under Obote and under Amin was a hard calling. They were both engaged in undemocratic practices, and persecuted minorities; they imposed policies of patronage and caused stress and civil tensions in society; and they failed to address the basic needs of the people, except the elite in their own communities. Targeted for persecution were the Acholi and Lunda people of the North. Corruption therefore was rife and poverty and suffering endemic. Perhaps they had not reckoned with the determination of the new prelate, also from the North. The persecution of the church was a daily occurrence especially for lower level preachers right from the beginning.

As bishop Janani Luwum endeared himself as a pastor of God's people. He was indefatigable in promoting development, addressing poverty, promoting education and using church facilities to establish health clinics and hospitals. He was also avid in calling communities to Christ, and for God to be at the centre of human life. He set the church on the path to becoming a prayerful and worshipping community, but he also realized that the church had to be self-sufficient both in terms of resourcing its work for mission and evangelism, but also to ensure that it produced its own indigenous trained personnel to meet the needs of the church in mission and evangelism as well as in development initiatives. He was also sensitive to the plight of refugees in his northern diocese bordering as it did the areas of Southern Sudan mired in a prolonged civil war. Luwum was as concerned about the spiritual welfare of his people as he was about their physical well-being. As a leader whose own Christian experience had been shaped by the East African revival, he stressed the importance of a personal relationship with the Lord of the Scriptures. He frequently led evangelistic missions and preached throughout the diocese. He identified, made disciples of Christ, or led many to Christ in a community where many had not been touched by the Christian faith, and he mentored young church workers who became leaders in their own right.

In 1974, three years into Amin's brutal regime, Janani Luwum was enthroned Archbishop and Primate of the Church of Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and Boga-Zaire. He had set himself the task of preparing the Church in Uganda to usher in the next century of the church as it celebrated the establishment of the Church in Uganda with the martyrdom of Bishop James Hannington (1885) and the Martyrs of Uganda (1887). He was keen to move the church to realize its evangelical mission. It was to

be a time of Thanksgiving and of memorializing God's blessings to the people of Uganda and East Africa. For him the church was ripe for reform in its spiritual life and in its public witness. He warned that the church should never conform to the powers of darkness – a theme he was to turn to again and again.

Events in Uganda hardly allowed the Archbishop to rest and to execute his mission in a calm atmosphere. He soon had to deal with situations where medical and health personnel in church hospitals were arbitrarily arrested. He had to intervene on behalf of young men who were arrested and tortured, and he became aware of many who had disappeared. At first he had sought to create a relationship with Amin where he could directly address his concerns to the Head of State, a practice apparently that had been built over many years with previous heads of state. Although Amin assumed the highest office unconstitutionally and undemocratically and that a military regime was contrary to the principles of the Christian faith, he nonetheless did not seek confrontation with the regime but to work with Amin for the greatest good. Luwum sought to mitigate the effects of his rule and to plead for the victims. For this he was criticized from all sides. In reply he made it clear that *“while the opportunity is there, I preach the Gospel with all my might, and my conscience is clear before God that I have not sided with the present government which is utterly self-seeking. I have been threatened many times. Whenever I have the opportunity I have told the president the things the churches disapprove of. God is my witness.”*

By reason of his office and his own spiritual bearing and fidelity to scripture and in honour of the church Archbishop Janani Luwum had to spell out the truth of the gospel and to give courage to a church that was in danger of cowing down to evil, deny the gospel, and betray her mission. In a book to mark a century of Christianity in Uganda Archbishop Luwum contributed a Foreword dated November 1976, two months before his own brutal murder. In the Epilogue to the book the Archbishop wrote as follows:

‘What will happen in the next hundred years or so?...we have seen that the Church is founded on the belief in the sure foundation who is Jesus Christ, the Saviour. He is the sure Rock of our Salvation and therefore we will not fear any evil. Jesus is not only the rock of our salvation or our refuge, He is also the Way, the Truth and the Life...There is no better assurance for the next journey than this.’

That was the level of his confidence in God, even as the dark clouds were gathering. In a radio broadcast at Christmas, his transmission was interrupted as he preached that Christians were called to suffering and should never be afraid. He himself lived daily with the a sense of death lingering. He said, ‘I do not know how long I shall occupy this chair. I live as though there will be no tomorrow...While the opportunity is there, I preach the Gospel with all my might, “ That sense of “not knowing” was both the mark of a terrorist regime, but also a mark of spirituality – being capable of living under God without knowing the future. In their A Century of Christianity in Uganda, Tom Tuma and Phares Mutibwa describe Archbishop

Luwum as 'a gentle, peaceful and humble man', a determined shepherd who 'was capable of searching for the hundredth sheep even if that meant risking his own life'. On 7 February 1977, he and Dr Sam Wills went to the notorious Naguru prison to look for the medical superintendent of Mengo Hospital, abducted from his house by Ugandan soldiers. He confronted evil where it mattered most. He even threatened that he would lead a popular march to the office of the President to demand an end to the atrocities and human rights violations.

In January 1977 there was a minor rebellion within the Army and seven people died as a result. In response a wholesale reign of terror was unleashed on the population of Uganda, mass arrests, detentions without trial, disappearances, and torture were widespread to an unprecedented degree. On Sunday, 30 January, Bishop Festo Kivengere preached on "The Preciousness of Life" to an audience including many high government officials. He denounced the arbitrary bloodletting, and accused the government of abusing the authority that God had entrusted to it. The following Saturday, an army of security officers raided the Archbishop's residence at gunpoint in the middle of the night. They claimed that they were looking for guns. The Archbishop and his family were terrorized. Another bishop was also raided and he too was terrorized.

On 12 February he led a delegation of bishops to deliver a note of protest to the President in the light of the atrocities committed by the agents of the state, and the effect that had on morale and safety of innocent law-abiding citizens in Uganda. The letter is a model of moderation and reasonableness. It decries the state in which Uganda finds itself where fear and hatred has become common, and many fear the agencies of the state. It also mentions that security and intelligent forces are using guns and violence against innocent people, and that there is a widening beach between government and people. It goes on to say:

Instead of that relationship you have suspicion, fear and hidden hatred. There is also a war against the educated which is forcing many of our people to run away from the country ... The gun which was meant to protect Uganda as a nation is being used against the Ugandan to take away his life and property. ... Too much power has been given to members of State Research who arrest and kill at will innocent individuals. Therefore that which was meant to provide the Uganda citizen with security is increasingly, becoming the means of his insecurity. ... We are all concerned about the developing gap between the leaders of Christian churches ... The security of the ordinary Christian has been in jeopardy for quite a long time. It may be that what has happened to the Archbishop and the Bishop of Bukedi is a climax of what is consistently happening to our Christians. We have buried many who have died as a result of being shot and there are many whose bodies have not been found, yet their disappearance is connected with the activities of some members of the security forces.

Besides the Anglican bishops, the letter was cosigned by the Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Kampala, and by the Moslem Mufti, among others. On 14 February, in a public rally, Amin announced that he had uncovered a plot against his

government. He produced a letter purporting to be from the exiled Obote implicating Luwum in the conspiracy. He did his best to deny it, but was harangued by Amin in public.

On 16 February Amin summoned religious leaders to the Presidential Palace, after which Luwum was made to remain behind. As the religious leaders left one by one, Luwum whispered to Bishop Festo Kivengere that “They are going to kill me ... I am not afraid.” He told the bishops not to be afraid because “I can see the hand of God in this.....” That was the last time he was seen alive.

The following day it was reported that the Archbishop had died. The story was told that he had died in a motor vehicle accident. His body was buried in secret at his home village in Macwini, in Northern Uganda. The people dug out the grave, opened the coffin and discovered that his body was riddled with bullets. There were even reports that having refused to “sign a confession” the Archbishop was shot dead by Amin himself.

It is widely acknowledged that Archbishop Janani Luwum was a church leader of exceptional piety, sound judgment and unremitting courage. He was thrust into the spotlight for the sake of the church, and he was given voice on behalf of victims to proclaim the Word of Christ to the powers and principalities of his time. Adrian Hastings in his *A History of African Christianity* wrote that it was the power of personal prayer, so much a part of African traditional Christianity, which ‘gave Janani Luwum the divine calm to face Idi Amin.’ He was, as Hastings put it, “the Thomas a’Beckett of Canterbury to King Henry VIII.” His contribution to martyrdom and Christian witness is immortalized on the statues to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Martyrs above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey, London, unveiled in 1998 (along with our own Manche Masemola!). The Church of England has added Janani Luwum to its Calendar of Commemorations, and his date is 17 February. The following Collect memorializes Luwum’s contribution to modern Christian martyrology:

God of truth,  
 whose servant Janani Luwum walked in the light,  
 and in his death defied the powers of darkness:  
 free us from fear of those who kill the body,  
 that we too may walk as children of light,  
 through him who overcame darkness  
   by the power of the cross,  
 Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
 who is alive and reigns with you,  
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 one God, now and for ever *Amen.*

Once again today’s readings give one a handle or a peg with which to hang the thoughts for today’s subject. They speak to the theological mind and spiritual understanding and practice of Archbishop Janani Luwum. It is not often that the designation of prophecy has been used to describe Luwum. That may have

something to do with the application of one view of prophecy, namely, forth-telling, or predictive proclamation. The prophetic voice, says Curtis Paul deYoung, serves as a conscience of the community in two ways. First through denunciation, pointing out what is wrong... and second, through annunciation, pointing toward truth and love. On both counts therefore Luwum life and work was exuding all the elements of prophecy. The prophet in addition lives a life of listening, and sharpening skills in listening to the voice of God. Mystical prophets and activists speak in both voices. In the Biblical idiom prophets may appear to be courageous but actually they fear God more than human beings. They put the political lord in their place as mere humans.

At times it may appear as courage that drives them, but it is less courage than it is a fear and awe of God. For that reason the prophet could flee from the clutches of Jerebel, and eventually, was to encounter God at Mount Horeb in the “sheer sound of silence.” So it was that the prophet Nathan could denounce David’s adultery with Bathsheba and the David’s hand in the murder of her husband; the Prophet Elijah could denounce the King Ahab over the unlawful seizure of Naboth’s vineyard, and to the later 8<sup>th</sup> century prophets, the purification of the nation, its spiritual renewal was part of the journey towards a new relationship with God, so that the covenant relationship may be restored and renewed. And so the prophet Jeremiah could exclaim:

To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear?  
See, their ears are closed, they cannot listen...  
But I am full of the wrath of the Lord;  
I am weary of holding it.

And so indeed, Luwum was called to “pour it out” (to use Jeremiah’s expression) – in other words to tell it as it is - on Idi Amin at a great cost to his life. But that was his calling. It has been said that spirituality often leads to suffering. It is suffering in the encounter with stubborn evil. It is risky business that comes with confessing Christ as Lord and savior. As the WCC Report *A Spirituality for our Times* puts it, “However faithless the church has been in (al) ages and in our own, in risking all and following the way of the Cross, it has also borne the marks of the Passion in countless of its members.”

In John 5:25 we see the transition from the teaching to the application. Here we are reminded of the immediacy that is both here and now, in other words, realized, but also that is to come with certainty and readiness. It cannot be gainsaid or wished away. It is almost upon us; and yet it is yet to be. The meaning being really that although it may not be fully realized, we are presented with an inevitability that can neither be ignored nor delayed any longer. It is the same kind of certainty, and the same words are used in John 4:21 where Jesus is in conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria. “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the father neither on the mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth...” the paradox may have been hard for the Samaritan woman to

understand. Yet in truth the messianic age is upon her and the whole of Samaria, even though the Christ was yet to be acknowledged. In the Christ who is the Incarnate Lord, we already have the earnest or sample guaranteeing what is yet to come.

But there is a second meaning behind our text. That is the interplay between hearing the word, or hearing the voice of God, and hear it. Even though they may die they are guaranteed eternal life because they heard the voice and responded to it. To rise up and walk is to confront the forces of darkness in a defiant move that itself is an assertion of the Lord of All life. Luwum's visits to the dreaded monster Amin was an act of living a life full of the Spirit and not fear, or acting out of fear.

It is my assertion then that truly the church in Africa and the Anglican Communion worldwide in particular has been enriched, renewed and brought to life by the witness of such as Archbishop Janani Luwum. His was not just an isolated witness of an individual, but it was the witness of the Church to the Christ of his time.

This week, Archbishop Thabo addressed the crisis in Uganda regarding the law now passed declaring the fact of homosexuality a crime. It also declares a crime any advocacy thereof, or assistance of any one in the practice of homosexuality. It is not, of course, beyond the realms of the imagination to realize that such a catch-all law will hinder legitimate pastoral counseling, as well as circumscribe the preaching of the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also not far-fetched to imagine that there will be sex police and vigilanteism abound harassing individuals and invading privacy and violating the dignity of citizens. It is therefore incomprehensible that the church in present-day Uganda has endorsed such a draconian law and fulminates against homosexual orientation and practice as private acts of individuals. That is in keeping with the attitude of the Church in Uganda on another matter within the Anglican Communion - the schism that is brewing in the Anglican Communion with regard to human sexuality, and the support for GAFCON and the Global South Movement. The question ought to be asked: what is the difference today, to what Archbishop Janani Luwum died for in 1977?

For us in South Africa, should we not be getting church leaders paying our own President Jacob Zuma a visit, like Luwum did, and demand that he resign, for the sake of our democracy and constitutional future that is tantalisingly within our grasp, and yet being subverted by a President who has no regard for his own constitutional oath? The first step to this nation changing course from the current prevailing damaging path that undermines everything that 1994 and the new constitutional dispensation stood for, is a renewed political will, and a reassertion of the new values that brought us to the brink of greatness as a nation. Is it not time, then, that we should say, "Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming and is now here." Or is it? Or is it 'not yet'?

Amen.

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