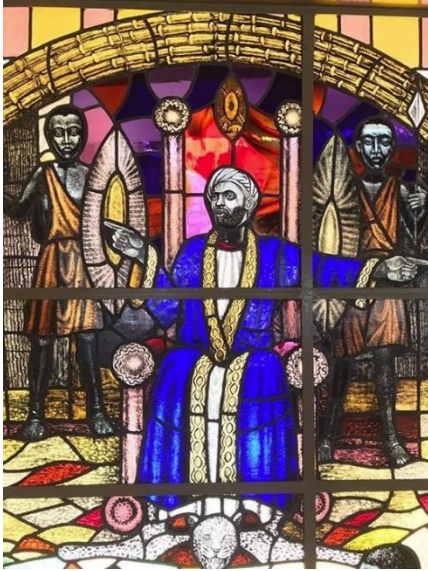


Shameless Faith

[2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12](#); [Mark 12: 18-27](#)

3rd June is a day on which we remember the Martyrs of Uganda. Rather than recalling just one individual, this day reminds us that many Ugandan Christians have suffered and died for their faith since 1884.



The cruel Kabaka (king) Mwanga came to power in 1884 and expected his subjects to be obedient to him. He saw the Christian missionaries in his country as a threat, and he hated the fact that Christians put their obedience to Jesus above his demands. He had three converts to Christianity, Yusufu Lagalama, Mako Kakumba and Nuwa Seranga executed in January 1885 because they followed the instructions of a missionary rather than his. Later that year, a Roman Catholic courtier, Mkasa Balikuddembe, was beheaded because he protested against the murder of Bishop James Hannington.

Mwanga became increasingly violent and cruel in his behaviour. A group of some 46 men and boys, mostly from Mwanga's court, and a mixture of Roman Catholic and Anglicans, were burned at the stake on 3rd June, 1886, because they refused to renounce their Christian faith. Jean-Marie Muzeyi was the last man to be put to death by Mwanga in January 1887.

Three years of such persecution might make you imagine that Christianity in Uganda would be stamped out or go underground, but it didn't. The message of the gospel spread out far beyond the court of King Mwanga. Rather than relying upon western, white missionaries to spread the Christian message, the story of these Ugandan martyrs inspired Africans to go out as missionaries. The Christian faith in Uganda continues to thrive.

Persecution of Christians in Uganda did not stop with Mwanga's behaviour. General Idi Amin took power of the country in 1971 and was merciless in his pursuit of Christians, which led to thousands of deaths. One of those who lost his life under the military rule was the Anglican Archbishop of Uganda, Janani Luwum.

Luwum protested against the behaviour of Amin's security services, joining with Catholic and Muslim leaders to try to find a solution to the violent situation in the country. He could have allowed his position in the church and his closeness to the dictator to protect him, but said, "I am prepared to die in the army of Jesus." His death was initially reported to have been in a car accident. He was later found to have been shot repeatedly.



How do these accounts of these Ugandan Martyrs make you respond? Would I be as bold in the face of such oppression as these people? Our reading from 2 Timothy 1 shows us how Paul was

not only also shameless in his proclamation of the Gospel, but also encouraged others to follow his example: “So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner.” (verse 8)

Naming some of these brave individuals is a way of bringing their story out from the shadows of history books and old newspapers. Their courage and integrity in the face of brutal persecution means that they should not be forgotten. However, the response of those who survived is also an inspiration to us: to keep praying, to hold on to the message of Christ, and to go out to share it with others.

God is full of surprises; his love and mercy is open to all. As a way of showing this, King Mwanga ended his days by converting to Christianity and being baptised into the Anglican church. Praying for the persecuted church is vital, but we must not forget to be praying for the persecutors, too.

The Collect

God of truth,
whose servants James, Janani and the martyrs of Uganda walked in the light,
and in their deaths despised the powers of darkness:
free us from fear of those who will 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.



Rev'd Vicky Barrettⁱ

ⁱ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uganda_Martyrs and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munyonyo_Martyrs%27_Shrine
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