

St. Mary Magdalene Church
22nd February, 2015

Romans 12: 1 – 2
John 12: 24 - 32

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

This evening we are remembering Archbishop Janani
Luwum's legacy, his life and death.

It was no ordinary death. He was killed 38 years ago by
Amin himself, proclaimed martyr a few days later, he
retraced the steps of the earlier Ugandan martyrs. Boys
pages at the court of the Kabaka, the King of Buganda
who died with the name of Jesus on their lips.

I knew Janani personally. I was his secretary, I cannot
forget him. He was someone who gave people hope in the
midst of suffering. He taught them how to endure
hardship. He was faithful to his calling outlined for us in
St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, chapter 12 verses 1 - 2

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of
God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices,
holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of
worship.**

Even at the point of death Janani could still sing, like those
boy pages at the court of the Kabaka, the King of Buganda
JESUS ALONE SATISFIES.

For me Archbishop Janani is a shining example of
Christian discipleship.

Janani was tall, jet black, a giant of a man, always smiling.
He became a Christian when he was working as a school
teacher.

On the day he was converted, January 6th, 1948, he climbed
a tree in the school compound and announced:

“Today I have become a leader in Christ's army. I am
prepared to die in the army of Jesus. As Jesus shed his
blood for the people, if it is God's will, I will do the
same”.

Bold words spoken by a brave man. God held him to that
promise.

At first Janani was an evangelist. He was never afraid to
preach the Word of God – to share his faith.

Later on he became a Pastor, a shepherd in the Church of
Uganda.

Later on still, when he became Archbishop, he had to
explain to all of us who were proud of his achievement -
that he had now become a servant of servants.

In his preaching Janani always painted a gentle picture of
God as a loving Father weeping over his lost children
whom he had cared for and had tenderly brought up,

asking: 'Where are all my children, the beautiful girls, the handsome young men – where are they? Why have they left me alone? Even the animals have more sense. The dog knows its owner'. Isaiah 1: 1 – 18

He always concluded his talks with a call to repentance, emphasising the need for us to say sorry to one another and to God, our Father, to put things right. Not to harbour grudges – nor allow the seeds of bitterness to grow in our hearts.

He would quietly ask the people. 'The Lord is saying to each one of. Why are you wandering in the bush? Repent – come home'.

I remember the joy, the fun of working with Janani, but I also remember the intense suffering and depression amongst the people of Northern Uganda following Amin's coup d'etat. Many people were bitter about what was happening in the country - all the killing, people disappearing. They were fearful of the future. They found it hard to work and even harder to forgive.

Later on the indiscriminate killing, the extraordinary powers given to Amin's soldiers to shoot first and ask questions later spread all over Uganda - no one escaped Amin's wrath during this period.

Janani was never afraid to seek an audience with the President, Idi Amin, if necessary alone, to share with him openly his anxiety about the growing lawlessness in the country. More than anything else Janani wanted the

Church under his leadership to have a guiding influence on the government.

It was his boldness and courage, his love of **all** people, not just his own tribe that cost him his life. He took his calling seriously.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.

Janani refused to conform to the world of Amin. He refused to compromise. He could have kept quiet. Many people suggested for his own safety he should consider leaving the country. His reply was always 'How can I leave God's people, the people he has entrusted to my care at this time?'

On Christmas Day 1976 Janani prayed for peace. He spoke of the social sins that destroy peace, such as an unforgiving spirit, jealousy, hatred, envy and greed. His message on the radio was cut short.

The Church of Uganda under Janani's leadership refused to keep quiet.

Amin accused Janani of plotting with Obote, the deposed President of trying to overthrow the government. He claimed that cases of arms had been found by children in Janani's garden.

Later these allegations were repeated at a public meeting. When Janani heard his name mentioned he made no reply,

he merely shook his head in denial. He knew they were going to kill him. He was not afraid.

As Janani was separated from his brother bishops on that final afternoon, he turned and smiled and said to them: 'I can see the hand of the Lord in this.' It was his farewell. They never saw him again.

At the time of Janani's martyrdom there was an outpouring of courage amongst the Christian community to witness more faithfully, to affirm Christ, for whom Janani had lived and died.

But since Janani's death, a question often asked is, "Did Janani die in vain?" His blood did not save the nation. Things did go from bad to worse as successive governments took power. Amin's regime released into Uganda a way of doing things that is summed up neatly in the last verse of the Book of Judges – 'In those days Israel had no king, everyone did as he saw fit'.

However, under the present government Uganda has achieved a measure of stability, but sadly Northern Uganda, Janani's country lagged behind.

Was it an unforgiving spirit? Or was it simply opposition to the current President that the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was formed? 1.7 million people were displaced by the LRA, tens of thousands were either killed or maimed, young boys abducted, turned into killers, young girls into breeding machines. The IDP camps were places of squalor and disease. People could not make a living for

themselves or grow food. For twenty years the Acholi people were fed on food aid, reduced to a begging mentality. The work of the church was also greatly hindered during this time of war.

So imagine our great surprise and joy during a recent visit to Northern Uganda in November last year when Neil and I found that peace seems to be real. The Acholi people have left the closed camps and returned to their home villages where they are growing food, putting up churches, learning how to help themselves, acquiring new skills – carpentry, hairdressing, dressmaking....

We know what happened to bring about this change? It is a story full of hope. The Lord has raised up another Janani. His name is Johnson Gakumba.

When he became Bishop in 2009 he suggested to the Acholi people "why don't we all begin again, this time with Jesus". Suddenly as if by miracle the Acholi people began to listen, to respond to voice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **"Be in earnest and repent.**

Revelation 3: 19

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At each service I attended with Bishop Johnson he would ask people to come forward to repent. Just like Bishop Janani did in the past.

People would come forward, confess: "I have killed many people": "I have been a witchdoctor for many years"..... The breakthrough came when the witch doctors began to repent.

Bishop Johnson is under great pressure from the witch doctors because they know they are losing their grip on the Acholi people. Bishop Johnson is a man of faith – another Janani! He needs our prayers.

In Paul's letter to the Christians in Corinth he writes:

“If one part of the Body suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

1. Cor. 12. 26

I believe Janani did not die in vain. His legacy is enduring. His life is an example of Christian discipleship. He kept the faith to the point of giving his life.

As Christians we are called to follow Christ to the Cross, to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, we cannot escape it. Janani's story helps me to focus on Christ alone. Hopefully it will also help you. I know that Janani is now one of that great cloud of witnesses encouraging us to continue to fight the good fight, run the race, and keep the faith, and last but not least to build this partnership relationship between St. Mary Magdalene Church and the Diocese of Northern Uganda through prayer, generous giving and visits. **Amen.**