

New Guinea Martyrs – 4 Sep 16

Readings: Zephaniah 3: 14-20; Psalm 130; Romans 8: 33-39; John 12: 20-32

The west fronts of great Cathedrals have a row of niches above the doors. Traditionally they have held statues of the apostles. Our Cathedral, St. John's in Brisbane has commissioned a number of statues depicting 24 biblical characters who played significant roles in the story of Jesus, instead of the usual collection of apostles. Those who have been to the Cathedral in recent times will know that 5 of the statues are now in place. The Cathedral Chapter was inspired by Westminster Abbey where in July 1998, in a departure from the usual practice, ten statues of martyrs of the twentieth century were placed in the niches above the west door of Westminster Abbey in London. Each one was an individual, but also a representative of all those who had died in similar circumstances of oppression and persecution. The martyrs of the Pacific region are represented by a statue of Lucian Tapiedi, one of the New Guinea Martyrs.

Lucian was born in 1921 or 1922, in the village of Taupota, on the north coast of Papua. His father was a sorcerer who died when his sons were quite young. Lucian was taught at mission schools and then, in 1939, he entered St Aiden's teacher training college. Here he became known as a diligent and cheerful presence, fond of physical recreation but also a musician. In 1941 he became part of the staff at Sangara as a teacher and evangelist. Lucian was one of the two Papuans who cared for a small group hiding from the Japanese in the bush near Isivita from July 22nd 1942, making daily trips from the village with food. When it was decided to abandon the hide-out and make for the coast, he made the decision to travel with them as guide. He was determined not to abandon the missionaries with whom he worked. They had only travelled a short distance when it was found that the carriers had left a package behind, some think on purpose. Lucian offered to return for it and was never seen again by the rest of the party. It is possible that this was the intention, to separate him from them, in order to kill him. One of the Orokaivans, a man named Hivijapa, killed Tapiedi near a stream by Kurumbo village. His killer later converted to Christianity. He took the name Hivijapa Lucian and built a church dedicated to the memory of his victim at Embi. There is at least one other church dedicated to his memory: St Lucian's in the settlement of Six-Mile near Port Moresby Airport.¹ Lucian Tapiedi's body was recovered and he was buried at the Sangara Mission Station. He rests beside Mavis Parkinson and May Hayman, killed by the Japanese near Popondetta. They, with another 9 clergy, nurses, teachers, builders make up the 12 Anglican Martyrs of New Guinea. Mavis, of course, has special connection with this community – she attended Ipswich Girls Grammar School and St. Paul's was her spiritual home.

Each of them died because, as an individual, they chose to continue to serve the people entrusted to them by God rather than travel to safety when they had the opportunity. Just over a week ago, I visited Mavis' niece, Mae Frame and spent an hour or so with her. She can't be here today as she's travelling overseas. Mae holds all of Mavis' letters and she told me that Mavis' letters make it quite clear she felt she couldn't leave those in her care. It is this act of personal self-denial in the face of imminent personal danger to their life that led to the deaths of each of them. The 2nd September

¹ This account is taken from *A Resource Book of the Martyrs of Papua New Guinea and Melanesia* written by Margaret Bride and published by the Anglican Board of Mission

has been chosen as one day to commemorate the 12 people who died on various dates in 1942 and 1943. In a number of cases the actual dates of their deaths are unclear. The very first Synod of the Diocese of New Guinea after the war ended requested that such a date be set aside. At first they suggested September 1st since by that day in 1942 it was believed that all the martyrs from the Northern Province and Port Moresby were already dead. This was later amended to September 2nd and has been observed since 1947. The Martyrs Memorial School built by the Anglican Church just after World War 2 was dedicated to them. It was the first high school in Papua New Guinea. In 1996 the date was agreed to be used as a commemorative date for all 333 Christian martyrs of the PNG in World War II. It is difficult to know exact numbers. At different times the lists have varied but Fr. Theo Aerts, a Roman Catholic priest who lived in PNG for many years gave the following numbers in 1994: *Anglicans 12, Roman Catholic 197, Evangelical Church of Manus 5, Lutheran 16, United Church 77, Salvation Army 22, Seventh Day Adventists 4*. Since 2003, this day has also been a day to remember the seven Melanesian Brothers killed in the Solomon Islands by the rebel leader, Harold Keke. The Brothers were involved in a mission to seek peace and reconciliation. Libbie and I knew one of them, Brother Robin Lindsay very well.

I think it's important we continue to keep this day. Papua New Guinea is Australia's nearest neighbour, closer than New Zealand or Indonesia. From 1896 to 1973 the Territory of Papua was an Australian dependant territory. From 1919 to 1973 the Protectorate of New Guinea was an Australian responsibility first under the Charter of the League of Nations and then under the United Nations. Today Australian governments always recognise that there is a special responsibility that we have for the nation of Papua New Guinea. Well, nearly always. The detention centre on Manus Island represents a shameful manipulation of that relationship. This government responsibility is mirrored in the responsibility that The Anglican Church of Australia has long recognised a special responsibility for the Anglican Church of PNG – in fact as many of you no doubt know, the pre-independence Diocese of New Guinea was part of the Province of Queensland. This relationship is taken up by the Anglican Board of Mission. In fact Libbie and I and Bishop Cameron and Kate first met twenty years ago when we were serving with ABM in Papua New Guinea. There is a desire in this Diocese to build on that relationship and at this year's Synod a motion moved by Bishop Cameron was passed – here is the text of it - "That this Synod affirms the long history of relationship between the Diocese of Brisbane and the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea (ACPNG), and requests the Diocesan Council, in consultation with the Anglican Board of Mission, to explore ways of better partnering with ACPNG in ministry and mission. Further, that an update and recommendations based on this work be presented to Diocesan Synod in 2017."

Those who died were ordinary Christian people, doing the tasks they believed God had called them to do. I don't think it's too difficult for us to find among them some particular person with whom we can identify and see that we are never too old, too young, too ordinary, too unskilled, to perform our part in the mission of God to bring his love and justice to this broken world. A key part of God's mission in which we share is reconciliation and forgiveness. The Psalmist writes today "There is forgiveness with you so that your name may be revered." The psalm praises a key attribute of God's very nature – that of forgiveness. Paul writes to the church at Corinth that God has given us a ministry of reconciliation² – that ministry is entrusted to us and is, or should be something that is

² 2 Corinthians 5: 18

part of our Christian life – we are to be reconcilers, not promoters or facilitators of division. James Benson was another priest serving in New Guinea in 1942. He was captured, but survived in spite of terrible conditions and treatment. After the war, he wrote a book about his experiences. Throughout the book, there is a sense of openness to those who were his captors. He recounts the stories of the good and the cruel who dealt with him during his captivity. He suffered the loss of friends and colleagues as well as the privations of being a prisoner of war, yet his attitude remained one of Christian compassion and forgiveness. The Anglican Church in Japan was in many ways ahead of its time in seeking reconciliation. In 1950 the Primate of Japan gave several bamboo crosses as a sign of contrition and these were erected in the parish churches of each of the martyrs. In 1980 the Bishops of the Anglican Church of Japan asked to hear the story of the New Guinea Martyrs at their annual meeting, however hard that would be for them. As a result, the following year their congregations gave a substantial donation towards the Chapel at Newton Theological College which is situated near Popondetta. The post war Director of the Anglican Board of Mission, Canon Frank Coaldrake was another who gave a great example by living out forgiveness and reconciliation between Australia and Japan. Patrick Redlich's book "My Brother Vivian" about Fr. Vivian Redlich who was engaged to May Hayman is ultimately a story of the healing found in reconciliation.

In the Gospel reading, some Greeks come to see Jesus. For some reason their interest helps Jesus realise that his hour has come. After his ministry in Galilee, Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem, "the world" represented by the Greeks is seeking him. Earlier in the Gospel he has told others that his hour has not yet come, and he has evaded arrest also because, John writes, his hour has not yet come. But now, "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."³ The whole story in the Gospel has been leading to this – but his glory is not human triumph. Jesus begins to talk about his own death using an image familiar to them all, a grain of wheat. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit." He says. It would have been so easy to avoid his hour, to take the easy option, to follow the crowd, to choose the path of human glory. The New Guinea Martyrs chose not to take the easy option. On hearing their stories it would be easy to give into to despair or even worse, to seek retribution or revenge. The stories of the New Guinea Martyrs – and those of more recent times from the Solomon Islands are not about death, they are about forgiveness, reconciliation, resurrection, life, hope. Their story, as Mae Frame said to me the other day goes on. May they inspire us, as they have inspired so many, to follow our calling as a people of God to be reconcilers, to make our community into a place where God is known; and where truth, justice, peace, love, hope reign.

³ John 12:23