

Sunday 2nd September, 2018
The Martyrs of New Guinea - Year B

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Psalm 130

Romans 8:33-39

John 12:20-26

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

“Amen, Amen I say to you: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.” On such a feast day as this, the words of Jesus cannot ring any more true.

Today we remember the Martyrs of New Guinea, slain on this day in 1942. Of course, in so doing, we also hold in our thoughts and prayers not only the 12 women and men who were killed on this day, but all those who have been and remain to this day victims of violence and terror, and those who have died in support of their friends, neighbors, and complete strangers.

In 1942 the Japanese invaded New Guinea and the island saw significant fighting. As war spread throughout the island, it became obvious to the white missionaries that they would be in most danger, and many hoped to leave the island quickly.

The talk of leaving became so loud that Bishop Philip Strong was forced to write to his clergy, "we must endeavor to carry on our work. God expects this of us. The church at home, which sent us out, will surely expect this of us. The people whom we serve expect it of us. We could never hold up our faces again if, for our own safety, we all forsook Him and fled, when the shadows of his Passion began to gather around Him in His spiritual and mystical body, the church in Papua."

Thanks in large part to the stirring words of Bishop Strong, the majority of missionaries stayed, and almost immediately their worst fears were realised. Arrests became common place and on this day in 1942, twelve brave souls were

executed "as an example." So who were the twelve martyrs that we remember today?

John Barge was an Englishman who migrated to Queensland in 1926. He studied theology in Brisbane, served in two parishes, then offered himself for mission work. Although he was well aware of the danger in which he stood he continued his healing and pastoral ministry for more than a year after the Japanese occupation. In October 1943 a landing force found John Barge going about his daily work quite openly. Local people hiding in the bush saw him executed, and they buried him there at the spot.

Margery Brenchley was born in England but migrated to Australia with her brother when she was a teenager. While in nursing training she attended the parish of Holy Trinity, Fortitude Valley. They supported her as their missionary from the time she went to New Guinea in 1927. Those who knew her as a mission nurse described her as totally devoted to the care of the native people. She initially declined an offer to leave, but later it was decided to travel to the coast; a decision which led to her capture and death on Buna beach.

John Duffill was born in Queensland. As a member of the parish of Wooloongabba in South Brisbane he was a member of the choir and eventually head server. He arrived in Papua in 1938 as a lay missionary. When the invasion was imminent he was due for home leave, but he declined to take it saying he wanted to stay to support the other members of the mission team and Bishop Strong. He was captured and executed on the beach at Buna.

Leslie Gariardi was a young teacher-evangelist who had recently completed his studies at St Aiden's Training College at Dogura. In 1942 he had recently been posted to Port Moresby as an assistant to Henry Matthews', whom he volunteered to accompany on the boat trip to Daru in early August 1942. He died from bullet wounds or was drowned when the ship, Mumuru, was attacked on August 7th by Japanese aircraft, somewhere beyond Yule Island.

Henry Matthews had been Rector of Port Moresby since 1927. He was also on the Mumuru when it was attacked. Some survivors tried to keep afloat but they also were shot until in the end only one survivor escaped. The remainder, including Henry Matthews were either shot or drowned.

May Hayman was came from Adelaide but had worked as a nurse in hospitals in Adelaide, Melbourne, Dubbo and Canberra. She was immensely happy in her work, and in her life at Gona. After the invasion, May joined a group who were going to attempt to reach Port Moresby. Four days later they reached the Japanese lines near Popondetta but they were captured nearby, and May was executed. After the withdrawal of the Japanese her body was reburied at Sangara in February 1943.

Henry Holland began the mission work in the Sangara district as a layman in 1922. He was ordained a priest in 1938. Following the invasion, his plan was to travel to Port Moresby, but he was captured by the Japanese and executed at Buna Beach.

Lilla Lashmar was a teacher who had offered for missionary service when she was a parishioner at St Cuthbert's in Prospect. She arrived in Papua in December 1920, working first at Gona, then in Dogura and finally began working at Sangara with Margery Brenchley. After the Japanese landing, Lilla was one of the group led by Henry Holland and assisted by Lucien Tapiedi and Andrew Aware, who left their hide-out in the bush to walk to the coast. They were finally caught, taken by the Japanese in a truck to Buna, and executed there.

Bernard Moore had initially come to work as a layman in teacher training but had then been ordained. It is not known exactly what happened to Bernard although it is assumed from what could be learned after the war that he died of an illness, possibly severe malaria. There can be no doubt that his decision to remain at his mission and with his people after the Japanese occupation led to his death.

Mavis Parkinson was born in Ipswich, Queensland and attended St Paul's parish church. She worked in an office, but when she felt called to mission service, she

retrained as a teacher. She was captured when travelling with a small group of Allied soldiers who were trying to make their way back to Port Moresby. She too was executed near the present day Popondetta in August 1942.

Vivien Redlich was born in England and ordained there. He came to Australia and after five years in Queensland he offered to serve in Papua New Guinea. In 1941 he was appointed priest-in-charge of the Sangara district. On the Sunday morning, as he was preparing for the Eucharist, one of his people told him that a villager had gone to report him to the Japanese but he calmly replied that it was the Lord's day and he would celebrate Mass for the people as planned. Exactly how he met his death is not clear, but that he died as a direct result of his faithfulness to his calling to serve God and His church is quite clear.

Lucian Tapiedi was born on the north coast of Papua. He was determined to the end not to abandon the missionaries with whom he worked. As they sought safety together, he offered to return for a forgotten item and was never seen again. There are a number of Churches dedicated in his name in PNG.

John's Gospel paints Jesus' death as the climax of history, and the beginning of universal mission and of hope. This is indeed a hard message. But it's not one so remote from our own lives. Life and fruitfulness come from self-giving. But it's hard, and it's painful. As we stand in the midst of the Kingdom of God that has already come and yet is not fully known on this earth, how do we see ourselves? Do we, by our words and deeds, stand with Christ as a part of his mystical body to share by word and example the good news of redeeming grace?

Most likely, none of us will be called to literally lay down our life for a friend, but there are endless chances for us to lay it down figuratively. In service to others we imitate the martyrs of New Guinea and we imitate Jesus Christ. May we each, by the grace of God, have the power to choose to imitate Christ.

In the name of God. Amen