

Albert John Luthuli (1898-1967)

Observed July 21

Albert John Luthuli won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1960. He was chief of his tribe within the Zulu people and an impassioned advocate of nonviolence and equality among all people. His father was a Christian missionary whose work took him away from the tribal home in Zululand to the Matabele in Rhodesia. Albert was still quite young when his father died and his mother took him home to South Africa where she did everything she could to secure a sound, thorough education for her talented and intelligent son, who went on to become a teacher in his own right and an advocate for opening all levels of education to native Africans. In 1936 he left his teaching post when he was elected tribal chief. Luthuli was also a lay preacher and leader in the Congregational Church both nationally and internationally. During the course of his life, the white government increased restrictions on all non-whites in South Africa, culminating in the promulgation of the infamous apartheid policy in 1948. Luthuli, whose work had been focused in education and the care of the members of his own tribe, joined the African National Congress in 1944 as the organization strove for universal franchise and fair treatment of all people. In 1951 the government demanded that he either leave the ANC or renounce his role as tribal chief. Soon afterward he was elected President-General of the ANC. Over the next several years he was variously banned from travel and from speaking, arrested for treason, accused of communist sympathies, and otherwise harassed by the white government. Through it all he remained faithful to his Christian faith, to nonviolence, to his people, and to a profound love for all humankind. Despite the efforts of the oppressive government to confine him and limit his influence, Luthuli remained an inspiration to people throughout his homeland and indeed the whole world until he was killed by a train in 1967.



Some notable quotations from President Luthuli:

"Humanity longs for the time when the great Powers of the world will become great at heart and curb their ambitions, and pave the way for the settling of their differences in a statesman-like manner and so remove the threat of war."

"Our cause is the cause of equality between nations and peoples. Only thus can the brotherhood of man be firmly established."

"...to engage human energy, human skill, and human talent in the service of peace, for the alternative is unthinkable - war, destruction, and desolation; and to build a world community which will stand as a lasting

monument to the millions of men and women, to such devoted and distinguished world citizens and fighters for peace as the late Dag Hammarskjold, who have given their lives that we may live in happiness and peace...”

“It is inevitable that in working for Freedom some individuals and some families must take the lead and suffer: The Road to Freedom is via the CROSS.”

“We know Christianity for what it is, we know it is not a white preserve.”

“We do not expect to see the Church organizing political movements. But it must be *with* people, *in* their lives.”

“I am in Congress precisely *because* I am a Christian. My Christian belief about society must find expression here and now, and Congress is the spearhead of the real struggle. ... My own urge, *because* I am a Christian, is to get into the thick of the struggle with other Christians, taking my Christianity with me and praying that it may be used to influence for good the character of the resistance.”

“The struggle must go on – the struggle to make the opportunity for the building to begin. The struggle will go on. I speak humbly and without levity when I say that, God giving me strength and courage enough, I shall die, if need be, for this cause. But I do not want to die until I have seen the building begun.” (conclusion of his autobiography *Let My People Go*)

Lessons Numbers 20:9-11; Psalm 122; Ephesians 2:12-17; John 16:25-33

Collect Eternal God, we thank you for the witness of Chief Luthuli, Nobel Laureate for Peace, who was sustained by his Christian faith as he led the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Strengthen us, after his example, to make no peace with oppression and to witness boldly for our Deliverer, Jesus Christ; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.