

there was hardly a healthy piece of flesh on him and so weak that he could not stand, with his unquenchable spirit he had survived. He was bed-ridden now, but the place where he lay became a shrine for men to visit and come away strengthened. Their number was evidence of how much he was beloved.

I stopped to chat with him every morning on my way to work on the railway. He always greeted me with a smile and a kindly word. His concern was for me rather than for himself. It was the same for his comrades, whose stories he knew so well.

One morning when I asked him how he was feeling he answered, 'Oh, I'm nae sae bad, sir. I might be an awful lot worse. There's always something to thank God for. I enjoy life and I've got good friends. And it won't be so long before we'll be goin' home.'

He gave me a big smile as though I was the one who needed encouragement.

When I returned that evening I learned that Jock was dead. He had died less than an hour after I left him. His body had given up the struggle at last. A very gallant spirit had left us.

CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

I do not know when the church at Chungkai was built. Perhaps 'built' is not the right word, for it was no more than a clearing in the jungle. It had for a roof the great vault of the firmament and for its walls the forest of bamboo. There were no doors. One could enter at any point. It was all door. It was hard to know when one was in church and when one was not. I remember watching two POWs carrying a load of bamboo through the neighbourhood. As they were jogging along, one of them shouted to the other, 'Take your hat off, Jock; you're in the house of God'.

The church was a fellowship of those who came in freedom and love to acknowledge their weakness, to seek a presence, and to pray for their fellows. The confession of Jesus Christ as Lord was the one requirement for membership. The church was made up of Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and former agnostics.

Two Chinese were among those baptized. Some British troops had found them still alive after a massacre on one of the beaches by the Japanese. The soldiers brought them back to Changi, dressed them in British uniforms and equipped them with fictitious identities. They were absorbed into the life of the camp and had come on with us to Chungkai. Here they were so impressed by what they had seen and heard of the example of their Christian fellows that they asked to be admitted to the Christian faith.

So far as many of us could see, there were three definitions of the Church. There was the church composed of laws, practices, pews, pulpits, stones and steeples; the church adorned with the paraphernalia of state. Then there was the church composed of creeds and catechisms, where it was identified only by words.

Finally, there was the Church of the Spirit, called out of the world to exist in it by reason of its joyful response to the initiative of God's love. Such a church had the atmosphere not of law court nor of class-room but of divine humanity. It existed wherever Christ's love burned in the heart of man. The physical temple and the doctrinal affirmation are both necessary to the fullness of the Church – but both are dead without the church that is communion, the fellowship of God's people.

Ours was the Church of the Spirit. It was not hidden in a corner, nor off on the periphery. It was the throbbing heart of the camp – giving life to it, and transforming it from a mass of individuals into a community. From the church we received the inspiration that made life possible, the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit that enabled men to live better lives, to create improvements for the good of others, and to make kind neighbours. The fruits were in evidence around us: 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, and faith.'

At one end of the clearing, prayerful hands had fashioned a Holy Table of bamboo on which were placed a cross and a lamp. The cross was a simply carved piece of wood; the lamp a tin can with a shoelace as wick. A roof of atap palm protected them from the elements.

These symbols were meaningful ones to us. The Holy Table reminded us of the holy fellowship to which we belonged, a fellowship made possible by the sacrifice of Him who is Lord of the Church, and by those who followed Him as apostles and disciples. Around the common table we gathered in visible evidence of His presence with us to heal, restore and to save.

The cross pointed us to our heavenly Father and at the same time reached out its arms to include us all in an expression of the Love that will never let go.

As the lamp flickered in the tropical darkness to give us the only light we had for our service, it reminded us of the life that is 'the light of men, the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world', the light that never fails.

I first became aware of the existence of the church at Chung-kai when the Rev. Alfred Webb invited me to help him. Padre Webb, a chaplain with the Malayan Volunteer Forces, had recently arrived from another camp. He had begun a most effective ministry, quickly establishing himself as a wise and kindly pastor to an ever-increasing congregation. He suggested that I might preach once in a while.

The Sunday evening came when I was to preach my first sermon. There were no homiletic aids of any kind. But there was the Living Word, God's testimony in the Bible, and His word for our condition. Shortly before the service was to begin, Bill Maclean handed me his Bible; it was open at these words in the twelfth chapter of St Luke: 'And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you are to answer or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.'

Thus strengthened, I found the words. I preached on the parable of the prodigal son. Men came with ready hearts to the services, hearts open to receive the blessings God alone could give. Days after they would approach me to discuss a point of interest. The nature of their questions made it plain to me that the basic spiritual needs are common to all men.

Every evening a service was held at which prayers were said for the sick, for those at home, and for our daily needs. We prayed for guidance and for strength to face the ordeals that lay

ahead. We needed the gift of a tranquil spirit, so we asked God for an untroubled sleep. In the security of our civilian lives, sleep was a matter to which we never gave much thought. But here it was different. Men's minds were troubled by the memory of pains and horrors that allowed them no rest. Often their screams disturbed the camp.

I remember a fellow prisoner in my hut who was dying of cerebral malaria. As he turned and twisted on his pallet he carried on a conversation with an unseen presence. He had been ordered to kill a Malay, accused of being a spy, for security reasons. His conversation went something like this: 'Of course I had to kill him. There was nothing else to do. But before I shot him through the head he looked at me, with eyes pleading for mercy. He cannot forgive me; his wife cannot forgive me; nobody can forgive me.'

He went on for hours arguing with himself in this vein. As he reached the darkest depths of the valley, he became quieter and then shouted out, 'But I am forgiven. You've given me peace.'

He was at rest, and at rest he died.

It was to calm ourselves, in the face of experiences like this, that we joined together in the closing prayer of the evening:

Oh Lord, support us all the day long of this troublesome life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed and the fever of life is over and our work is done. Then, Lord, in thy mercy grant us safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at last; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When we said the Lord's Prayer we stumbled over the phrase, 'And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us.' This was not only because some of us were of Scottish background and used to saying 'debts' and 'debtors'.

It was because it meant asking forgiveness for the Japanese. We had learned from the gospels that Jesus had his enemies just as we had ours. But there was this difference: he loved his enemies. He prayed for them. Even as the nails were being hammered through his hands and feet, he cried out, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' We hated our enemies. We could see how wonderful it was that Jesus forgave in this way. Yet for us to do the same seemed beyond our attainment.

The first Communion which I attended was memorable. The elements were of our daily life: rice baked into the form of bread and fermented rice water. The solemn words of the fraction were said:

Who the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread and when he had blessed it and given thanks, he brake it and said, Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me.

We broke the bread as it was passed to us and handed it to our neighbour. The elements were returned to the Table, a prayer of thanksgiving said, a hymn sung, and a blessing given. We slipped quietly away into the singing silence of the night, cherishing as we did so our experience of the Communion of Saints – the Holy Spirit had made us one with our neighbours, one with those at home, one with the faithful in every land, in every age, one with the disciples.

All the while our own future was unpredictable. We didn't know what the Japanese had in store for us. But whatever happened, we knew that Jesus our leader would never fail us. As He had been faithful to His disciples in the first century, He would be faithful to us in the twentieth. In the words of John Masefield's play, He is 'let loose in the world'.