

Title: *A voice, A mirror, and A faith*

Scripture Reading: John 1:23, Acts 6:15; 7:55-56, Matthew 14:28

He (John the Baptist) said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness"

And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

"But he (Stephen), being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

But Peter left the ship, a very bold step of faith. One glimpse of his Savior was enough. He cried out, "If it be thou... bid me come to thee ... on the water..!"

There are three great truths I would like to bring to your attention. Each is a definition of what a true Christian ought to be. Three anointed men of God best exemplify these 3 truths and they are John the Baptist, Stephen, and Peter. These 3 were all

New Testament Saints, thus relevant to the Saints of today. John the Baptist was a Voice. Stephen mirrored the glory of God. Peter took a bold step of faith. Three of them were marvelous in their own rights from their lives and ministry. We can learn what God desire for us in the way of service, how we can reflect His glory and the kind of daily walk that are most pleasing to Him.

1. John, A Voice

John showed us the kind of service most pleasing to the Lord. Here was a servant of the Most High. Scripture says he 'was the greatest among them that are born of women.' He was the greatest, most blessed of all the prophets and a revered preacher of righteousness. What Jesus meant was that no man in all history up to that point was greater than John the Baptist. His greatness came not from political power, miracle, or wealth but from his role in God's redemptive plan. He was not a king, like David. He was not a wealthy person like Solomon. He was not a politician like Daniel. He was not a teacher of the Law like Gamaliel. He was a common man like all of us. His lodging was in the wilderness. His food was locust and honey, both common food, found easily in the market, or in the wilderness. His clothing was made of camel's hair and he has a leather belt around his waist.

Maybe he needed a leather belt because of years of fasting and the belt was needed to hold his clothes together. Yet it is his role that makes him the greatest among all man. He said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.' John was blunt but simple. Nobody likes blunt people. Yet crowds flocked to hear his scorching messages. Many were baptized and became his disciples. Soldiers, Pharisees, the bureau of internal revenue, politicians all came. Even royalty came under his mighty influence. His influence reaches all classes of people. His impact was so astounding that others considered him to be Elijah raised from the dead. Even Jesus said, 'he was a type of Elijah.' How did John the Baptist achieved such a status? The answer came from himself. He said he was only a voice. John refused to be exalted or promoted. He considered himself unworthy to even touch his master's shoes (Jesus). He knew he cannot be compared to Jesus. He knew he is not the savior but his role was to point to the savior. I learned a long time ago that I am not a savior of people. I can help people with the strength of Jesus. But I am not to take the role of the savior. He emptied himself of self-serving and continually withdrew from center stage. In his own eyes he was not even worthy to be called a man of God but only a voice. Not just a voice but a voice in the wilderness. The phrase 'a voice in the wilderness'

first appeared in **Isaiah 40:3** and then quoted in all four Gospels. John sees himself as just a messenger, a voice, to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. This is what we need today. We need a voice to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. The wilderness is dry, harsh and unable to give lasting life. The wilderness points to spiritual barrenness and extreme distance from God. The world today is a wilderness. The world today is a life apart from God. The wilderness is a place of spiritual barrenness. Deserts symbolize lifelessness and human inability (the powerlessness of man). The wilderness is also a place of loneliness and struggle. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days. 40 represent a generation. 40 represents a man's lifespan on earth. And our lifespan on earth is but a place of loneliness, struggle and temptation. We struggle with human inability and lived a lifeless life. The Wilderness is also a place of wandering. Humanity without God is pictured as a lost sheep. Today, there are bitter cries in the wilderness and John became that voice who heard the cry in the wilderness. Yet God meets us through a voice in the wilderness. God is still speaking through a voice, like that of John the Baptist. Many a times, it is a still voice of God but gently yet relentlessly speaking to the inner man. John the Baptist became God's voice. Through that voice, it becomes a place of encounter and

transformation when God's voice breaks through. We are called to be a voice in the wilderness.

What a powerful rebuke to us in this age of self-occupation, promotion of personalities, influence-grabbing, ego-tripping, and seeking of honors. The social media promotes self. I was driving towards Jaro Plaza, just a few days ago and I saw a billboard that wrote: 'a global evangelist coming and you can attend at Iloilo Convention Center. He is not just an evangelist, but a global evangelist. I really respect Billy Graham. I mean he preached the Gospel for 70 years but he never became a multi-millionaire. He was a salaried man and yet he lived a respectable life. It was said that his ministry reached a billion souls. Billy Graham was a voice. John the Baptist cried out, 'I must decrease – He must increase.' And to reach that goal, John kept reminding all who heard him, 'I am just a voice.'

How many who are in the limelight today are prepared to lose their following – to be set aside and out of sight – to no longer be the center of things – to be placed on a path of decreasing popularity and usefulness? In our almost 40 years of ministry, we heard many times from members this statement; you need to stay, you are the answer, you are indispensable, without you this

church will die. We hate that because we knew long ago that we are not the savior. I think it is very good for Pastor Lily and I to go back to Singapore to lose our following, to be no longer the center of things. And to find joy and fulfillment, not in pastoral service, but in devoted communion with the blessed Lord. The greatest rewards will probably go to those who are hidden and unknown, but who glorified the Lord mightily by being the simple witness to His faithfulness in their struggles.

The secret of John's happiness was his joy not in his ministry or his work, not his personal usefulness or widespread influence. His pure joy was to stand in the presence of the bridegroom, hear his voice and rejoice in it. Anna and Simeon were unknown figures, serving faithfully in the temple and yet God took it upon himself to bring Jesus to them, so they can see the savior. All of us can be useful in the kingdom of God. If you cannot do anything, you are to be a prayer person, every day praying for the church, the family, people. You do not know how powerful you can be by being a prayer person. If you can only do that, you are a voice in the wilderness. We all heard about Charles Finney, one of the greatest revivalists who ever lived. Yet his secret was a number of people, behind the scene, praying for Charles Finney

before he stepped onto the pulpit. And I wondered at times, why John the Baptist was called the greatest among all prophets. I believed the chief reason was his willingness to be just a voice and he received the greatest commendation from His God, His Savior Jesus Christ.

The present currents of restlessness and despair in this world cannot touch this child of God who is obsessed with the presence of the Lord. The world, the church does not need more 'name' evangelists or miracle workers or great orators. The real need is not for more pastors or teachers. Nor a need for more founders of great charitable works. Rather the real need is for humble, unknown, unheralded voices. Voices that testify to a doubting world that **Christ is enough** to see everyone through any crisis. That Christ is a tower of strength.

This morning, God needs voices, those who will stand up, in the midst of all the raging trials and temptations and cry out 'God is faithful,' There is a need for voices who can look sickness and death in the face, and proclaim, 'He is all He said He is. He has proven His voice to me in my darkest hour. He has been strength to me in my time of weakness. He has been a friend, a hiding place. Serving Him makes the difference.

Today like John the Baptist, we can be a voice in the wilderness.

- a. Speaks God's truth clearly. John's message was simple, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' Share the word of God plainly, not watered down, even if it is unpopular.
- b. Share scripture in daily conversations with friends and family.
- c. Live simply. Like John who reflected God message. Let integrity, kindness and holiness be your testimony in school, workplace, or home.
- d. Help people see their need for Christ.

2. Stephen, a mirror.

And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand

of God and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56).

The council was the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body, passing judgment. But when they saw his face, it was like the 'face of an angel.' It has the radiance of God's glory. It was peaceful and serene that showed divine calm and confidence. Stephen mirrored the face of God. Stephen mirrored the glory of God.

Stephen represents what a true Christian is supposed to be: one who is full of the Holy Ghost with eyes fixed on the Man in glory. He is one who mirrors that glory in such a way that all who see it will be amazed and filled with wonder. It was this face that deeply imprinted into the mind of the raging persecutor of the Way, Saul. Saul could never forget that face that he had to write about it. It was this face that turned Saul into Paul, the greatest apostles of Jesus Christ. He is one with a steady gaze fixed on Christ, always looking up to Him, fully occupied with a glorified Savior.

Look at the hopeless condition Stephen found himself in. Many a times we are in similar situation. He was surrounded by religious madness, superstition, prejudice, and jealousy. The

angry crowd pressed in on him, wild-eyed and bloodthirsty. Death loomed just ahead of him. What impossible circumstances. But looking up into heaven he beheld his Lord in glory, and suddenly his rejection here on earth meant nothing to him. Now he was above it all, as seeing Him who was invisible.

One glimpse of the Lord's glory, one vision of His precious holiness and Stephen could no longer be hurt. The stones, the angry cursing, all were harmless to him now because of the joy set before him. One glimpse of Christ's glory places you above all your circumstances. Keeping your eyes on Christ, consciously reaching out to Him every waking hour, provides peace and serenity as nothing else can.

How true that we become what we behold. The proper translation should read, "We all, with open face mirroring the glory, are changed!" We become what we look at most of the time, what occupy our eyes. The idea is that the Christian reflects, like a mirror, the glory on which he gazes continually. It is we who are "in the glass" - a mirror - looking on Christ, the object of our affection and becoming like Him in the process of beholding.

We do not change ourselves - the revelation of Christ changes us.

**When the pangs of trial seize us,
When the waves of sorrow roll,
I will lay my head on Jesus --
Pillow of the troubled soul:
Surely none can feel like thee,
Weeping one of Bethany!
"Jesus wept!" -- that tear of sorrow
Is a legacy of love.
Yesterday, today, tomorrow,
He the same doth ever prove.
Thou art all in all to me,
Living one of Bethany!**

Stephen did not become God, but he mirrored God's glory, character, and peace. His fearless testimony and his Christlike forgiveness all revealed God to those around him.

We may not literally glow but people can sense when God's presence, joy, and love radiate from us. Spend time in God's presence through prayer and the word. Our lives will reflect God when we walk closely with him. When the world looks at us, our honesty, purity, and kindness will reflect God's

holiness. We also reflect God's glory by speaking the truth. Share God's word with humility, and let your words build others up instead of tearing them down. Live with heaven in view. Keep your eyes on eternal values, loving God, loving people, storing up treasures in heaven.

3. Peter, a bold step of faith.

It is one thing to have the Lord come to us in our trials and circumstances to calm our troubled souls and hush our fears - but it is something altogether different to step out in the midst of turmoil and go after Him. The disciples who stayed in the boat were no doubt thinking, "It is enough to have Him nearby and to know He cares for us in this storm. Let's just sit still and wait till He comes to us." But Peter left the ship, a very bold step of faith. One glimpse of his Savior was enough. He cried out, "If it be thou... bid me come to thee... on the water..!" **(Matt. 14:28).**

The key to this important lesson is, "come unto thee... on the water..." Jesus said "Come." So, keeping his eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, Peter took that great step of faith and for a while walked on the water. It was devotion that drew Peter out of that storm-tossed boat. He was not showing off his faith. He was not trying to belittle those left in the

boat. He simply wanted to be nearer his Lord. He prized his Lord for who He was, and not because of the gifts and blessings He bestowed.

It's true that Peter sank when he took his eyes off the Lord - but so do we all. And the truth of the matter is Peter is the first man on planet earth that walked on water, besides Jesus of course. Have you ever walked on water? It came about because of a step of faith. The Christian life is not one of passive faith. Yes, at times, we are to wait and be patient. But many times, when it comes to trials or events, it calls for the bold step of faith. I think in my own personal life, the thing that I remembered the most, achieved the most are those times, I saw bold steps of faith taken.

I remembered that when Jan saw her result in her board exam, she literally crumbled that piece of paper. She was all in despair and hopelessness. I too, entered into a state of despair and the future looks bleak for Jan. I can still remember, we were in a hotel in Cebu. Phone calls were made back and forth between Singapore and Philippines. But Pastor Lily was simply praying in that hotel room. Jan and I were just in the boat, hoping that God will help in the future. But Pastor Lily would have none of that. She was bombarding heaven. She was taking the bold step of faith into the water.

Pastor Lily rushed to Singapore, afraid that Jan would do something foolish, like committing suicide. I felt hopeless accepting the situation; like *que sera sera*, whatever will be, will be. That was how bad the situation was at that time. The teacher that loved Jan told her to go for the interview to be a scholar, studying in France. Jan kept saying, 'My result is not good enough, I cannot qualify for the scholarship in France.' Pastor Lily was the one who continually took the bold step of faith. She literally grabbed Jan to the interview. Jan did not want to go. But she was forced by Pastor Lily. Reluctantly she went for the interview. There were 3 panel of interviewers. They looked frightening. While Jan was answering the 3 interviewers' questions, Pastor Lily was below the building inside the car bombarding heaven. She was accepted. But when we finally arrived in France at the French University, the administrator would not accept her. Jan battered by the recent board exam result was deeply affected. Her faith was so low that she kind of accepted that she may not be able to enroll in that university. It was my turned to face the French administrator and said, 'but the dean of the school accepted her. You must give her a placement in school. Unwillingly she enrolled Jan. The rest is history. Of course, today Jan is back in her faith. She can boast of her scholarship in France. That was the glory. But the

glory only came when bold step of faith was taken. Many people admired her. But she failed badly during that period. Many of us, never get what God wanted us to have because we never took that bold step of faith. The Christian life is one of continual bold steps of Faith. You only grow properly when you continued to take bold steps of faith. And bold steps of faith comes about because of close relationship with God. I respect Pastor Lily. If she had not taken bold step of faith to move into this building in 2012, we would never have a church here. Everything was so bleak and dark. But she took that bold step of faith. The Singaporean couple pastors in Cebu, gave up in the midst of attacks and set back and lost that church. Remember, God repeated the command to Joshua 3 times, for emphasis, 'Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.' Jesus repeated the same commandment to us as Christians, 'Go ye into the world and preached the Gospel, and lo and behold, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'

The truth is that Peter did walk on the water. By faith he had discovered a place in Christ above the stormy, raging sea. He was walking over what threatened him. The storm kept the waters boiling

- Peter did not walk on a sea of glass. Yet he did walk on or above the turmoil; that is the real lesson. Jesus only needed Jesus to fix his gaze on Jesus.

Are not we all a bit afraid when strong, - dark winds gather round us. Haven't there been times in your life you thought you were sinking - for good? In a way I'm glad Peter failed, because that relates best to my condition. Often, I've had that sinking feeling - wondering how I could ever stay above it all. David Wilkerson remembered something his grandfather told him years ago: "Keep your eyes on Jesus. Get as close to Him as you can. That is the secret to victory, to holiness, and to peace."

Today, we have a greater John the Baptist, a greater Stephen, a greater Peter. What kept our Lord above all the circumstances in His life? Jesus wept, He hungered, He hurt, the sun burned Him, He grew weary, He was like any other man in the natural who is affected by conditions. Yet He was always above it all - because He was never doing His own work or fulfilling His own will. He did God's will perfectly - He was totally dependent on His Father - His eye was fixed only on the glory of His Father. It was that focused "single eye" that was His secret of victory in every crisis. Yet he had to seemly fail because of each and everyone of us. In

His worst crisis, he was crucified. Instead of rest, he was so troubled at the Garden of Gethsemane that he prayed in deep anguish but God did not answer his request. Why? Because of us. He had to die for our sins. He had to be crucified so that when He is risen, we would be victorious in all things, when we believed in him. God did not give Jesus a way of escape because of us. Jan would not have that scholarly without Jesus. We would not have moved to this building without Jesus. It is only possible because of Jesus's death that makes victory possible. But we can only claim victory by bold steps of faith. Jesus said, we can do greater things because Christ has already died at the Cross and he gone to the Father in heaven and given us the Holy Spirit, that we can do all things through Christ that strengthen us.