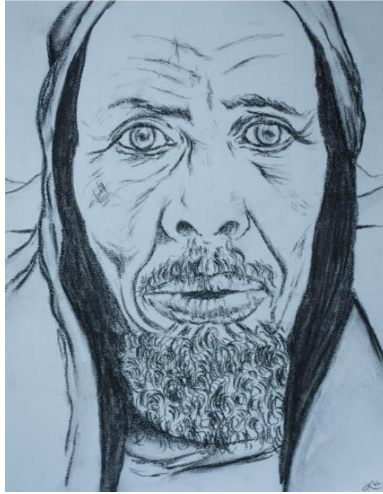


A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS



And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

John 1:19-23

When Jesus met the men who were to become his disciples, each of them was wrapped up in something other than the Kingdom of God. It was essential for them to be set free from these other attachments so they could serve Jesus without conflict.

What use would they have been if all the time they were walking through Galilee with Jesus, Andrew was secretly thinking, "I really should be out there fishing today." And Peter was saying to himself, "I wonder what my wife is going to do to me when I get home", if Simon the zealot was still spending 50% of his time with the revolution.

Jesus didn't make them sign a contract giving up everything to the Kingdom. Nor did He put them through six weeks of brainwashing to wean them away from their wives and fishing fleets.

Jesus simply opened their eyes to see the Kingdom of God. And when they saw the Kingdom, all the other loves in their lives began sinking to their proper level all except one.

When the disciples got that vision of the Kingdom of God it was easy enough to leave their boats and their tax offices behind - to kiss their wives goodbye for the time being.

But there was one love that went with them even after they had forsaken all to follow Jesus:

Self-love. Ego-love.

The craving to be somebody special---even in the Kingdom of God.

"Lord, grant us to sit at your right hand and your left hand in your Kingdom."

"Let's have a caucus and find out who's number one man around here."

Right up to the night of Jesus' betrayal, they were still hassled with the problem of which of them was the greatest. After all Jesus had taught them about meekness and all the warnings He had given about what happens to those who exalt themselves, they were still scrambling for that top place – that big-time summit.

It's no use forsaking your worldly attachments...

... if you're still going to be dragging your ego around with you.

Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor.... Though I give my body to be burned, if I'm chained to my ego still reaching out and taking glory for myself - I'm a hindrance to the purpose of God on this earth.

Before Jesus could entrust to these disciples the real work of the Kingdom, the ego had to die.

And the miracle happened when Jesus died on the cross. At the cross the curse of self was broken for them. When they saw Jesus alive from the dead, they suddenly forgot about their own glory and started worshiping His.

In the Book of Acts you no longer see the childishness in the apostles that was evident before. The epistles of Peter have a very different tone from the blustering Simon of those early days. Peter is no longer trying to prove something or to be somebody. Peter is a servant of Jesus Christ, and that's all.

But for many of us, this still hasn't happened. Our lives may be wrapped up in the Kingdom. We may have broken with our old ways.

We pray. We study. We work. We help others

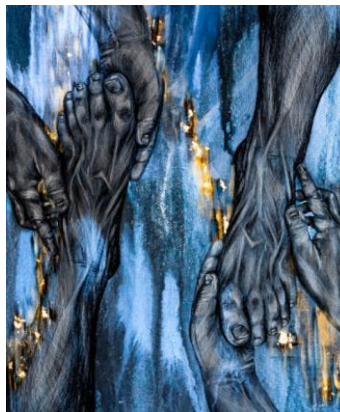
– Yet our egos are still very much alive.

We don't want to be this way, but we are.... glory-hungry! – hurt when somebody else gets the credit.

We are still in bondage to self.

We know the doctrine – the doctrine is that our ego has been crucified with Christ. We know that we are to reckon ourselves dead with Christ – buried in that tomb with Him and so free from the old curse of self-centeredness.

But to make that doctrine work – to live as men and women who are crucified with Christ – we need to know where we fit, now that we're crucified. We have to know who we are – what we're here for.



When we know who we are in our Messiah, then Satan won't be able to puff us up with some grandiose vision of ourselves---i.e. that we're "God's man for the hour", "God's special woman". We don't need candy for our ego when we know who we are and what our job is.

And to know who we are and what our job is, we look at John the Baptist. Jesus never had to preach to John about humility - never had to warn John about pride. John the Baptist knew who he was and who he was not and he never got it mixed up.

When they sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him "Who are you?", John was clear,

"I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

No attempt to cut in on that glory.

So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

If you want to translate the doctrine about being crucified with Christ into a life –

If you want to keep that ego in the grave and live a life free from its curse –

Learn from God who you are. Be that man - that woman and only that.

Like John the Baptist you are not the Christ, you are not Elijah, you are not that special prophet. Satan will try to convince you at times that you are all three. People will come along and try to induce you to be their Christ – and you'll be tempted to play the role.

Our churches are full of little popes and bishops and "mother superiors" running around trying to play roles God never gave them.

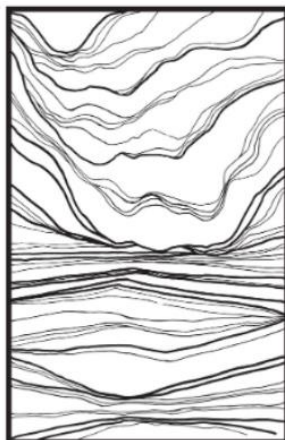
Trying to dominate other lives.

Trying to engineer people's salvation.

They put humility on their faces and piety in their voices. They may walk with a humble step, but their egos are as big as Lake Superior. And all the while they are refusing to be the one thing God ordained them to be. A voice in the wilderness.

Listen carefully. God ordained every one of us - every follower of Jesus - to be exactly what John the Baptist knew he was – the voice of one crying in the wilderness:

The Voice of one crying in the wilderness "Make straight the way of the Lord".



– that's what we are, nothing more – nothing less.

1. Your Life is a Voice.

If you have committed your life into the hands of the Lord - if you know yourself to be crucified with Christ.... that it's no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you - then -

Your life is now a voice.

Not a mouth – a voice.

You can see a mouth but you can't see a voice.

All that matters is the message that that voice speaks. If the voice speaks truth, those who hunger and thirst for truth will recognize it and draw near.

Your words.
Your deeds.
Your silence.
Your singing.
Your work - convey a message.

All the time the voice is speaking the one message that this world needs to hear:



Make straight the way of the Lord.

If at any point the voice quits, or if it becomes uncertain, or if it begins to contradict itself, it is then useless. Like a branch on the vine that bears no fruit - or like salt that has no taste.

2. Your Voice Should Cry in the Wilderness.

And never forget *where* you've been put to be that voice!

You've been put in the wilderness.

The wilderness is a strange hostile place -

- a place where there is no security, no recognition, no friends to make you feel at home.

The wilderness can be a crowded street, a plush living room, a factory, an office, a school.

Fame means nothing in the wilderness.
Riches mean nothing in the wilderness.
Comforts mean nothing in the wilderness.

Who feels like stretching out on a mattress when the wolves are howling?

People came from Jerusalem and all Judea to hear John the Baptist in the wilderness. But even when he saw 10,000 faces gathered before him, it was still a wilderness. John knew that their souls were as wild and desolate as the countryside around them. He didn't depend on them for a thing. He depended only on God.

When believers start feeling at home in this world, when they start settling in and getting comfortable - their message loses its edge.

It's a wilderness, Friend. It's not home.

And you depend on nothing else as you get on with the job you have to do.

3. Your Voice should be clearing a path for Him.

You have a message. You are the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the Lord."

We don't tell the world "Go out and find God".

We tell them "God is finding you".



Clear a path for Him. Make the road straight.

We don't have to prove anything - God will do the proving.

We don't have to convince anybody - God will do the convincing.

We simply proclaim, "He's coming! Make His path straight!"--- and He comes! The Lord comes to them now through His Spirit every time we go out and proclaim the message.

***And the disciples went and preached everywhere,
the Lord working with them, confirming the Word with signs following.***

Mark 16:20

When people respond, we show them how to make a straight path for the Lord.

We disciple them - teach them all things that Jesus Himself has commanded us - and together with our new brothers and sisters we keep moving through the wilderness proclaiming the message. Proclaiming the message until He comes.

And to those who reject the message we give a warning,

"He's coming soon in unspeakable glory, to judge this wilderness and transform it into what it was meant to be. Repent before it's too late. Make straight the way of the Lord."

And there our job ends. We are not building kingdoms, or names, or reputations, or movements, or churches.

Jesus does the building. The Father gets the glory.

It is our joy, as the Spirit gives us utterance, to be the voice of one crying in the wilderness –That's all we are.

God preserve us from ever trying to be anything more.



"Make straight the way of the Lord."

Prayer: Lord, help us to let go of our egos, to stop mixing up our ministries, our vision with a means to bring glory to ourselves. Help us to be willing to be satisfied with just being a voice, a life crying in the wilderness. Help us to be so filled with you, that our lives are your voice and those who are frightened, hungry, lost in the wilderness will recognize the path to draw near to you. May our words, our lives, our tender care speak to them of your love for them and your desire to comfort and heal them, that you are coming for them. In every area of our lives, may we be discipling people to your ways. Oh, and yes, may this bring us joy, utter joy to be your voice in the wilderness. Amen.

Maranatha Mirror

Message: Richard E. Bieber unknown date.

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[Maranatha Mirror Messages](#)

mmirror.net

maranathamirror18@gmail.com

586-530-6983

