

THE WAY FORWARD

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: James 2:14-26

This past week, on the 20th, we celebrated the 26th anniversary of CAP. We were able to reminisce and see God's faithfulness over the years. Vignettes kept coming to mind; memories of things that happened over the years, reminding us of how faithful God has been. What a joy it has been to partner with Him in the work that He has been doing here at Powai. Over the years, many people have asked me: Why the name Church at Powai? My response has always been: when we were looking for a name, we said we want a name that really doesn't make people decide whether or not they want to come to a church based on the name. We want people to come here, experience what the church is about, and then decide whether they'd like to continue. So often we get swerved by – Methodist or Baptist or Lutheran or Pentecostal or whatever. We wanted people to come in here and then see whether they fit in here, whether they like what's going on, and then decide. So we'll call it The Church at Powai, like the Church at Antioch in the Bible.

Right from the beginning, 26 years ago, there was a strong divide between the mainline churches and charismatic churches. We felt God telling us to be in the middle – straddle the two if you would. There was a book that came out at the time called Empowered Evangelicals. The premise of the author was that it doesn't have to be an either/or situation; it doesn't have to be either mainline or charismatic. It can be both/and, it can be both mainline and charismatic. In other words, we were drawn to this fact that we could hold on to the solidity of the Word which is espoused by the mainline churches, and yet be able to give the freedom to the Holy Spirit to work in our midst, which is the key cornerstone of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. So we said we'll stay by everything that the Word tells us, that will flow through us, but we will never box the Spirit of God and say: This is how You ought to work in our midst. We give You full reign to do whatever You want.

So that's how we came to this place that we have held over these 26 years. Our logo and our theme were "Lift Jesus Higher" which has been a song that we've sung often from John 12:32. Jesus said: *And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself.*

We were very clear about our responsibility. Our job is to lift Him up; His job is to do the drawing. That was it! we are not able to draw people unto Him. Our job is to lift Him up and His Spirit will do the rest. So, lifting Him up meant preaching the Word, making sure that all know about salvation, what His death and resurrection meant. All that is involved in lifting Him up. Then we have the drawing of people to him. Clear delineation!

Ten years into CAP, we began to ask: Lord, is there something that you want us to focus on? Is there something that needs to change? Is there a move that you want us to make or something that You want us to put our attention to. After some time, we felt four words come to us: "Dig Deeper and Reach Further." So that's what became our focus. We said our depth or how deep we go into the Word will never be at the expense of our scope or the things that we want to do or our reach. And our reach will never be at the expense of our depth. We'll hold both those polarities together and we will make that our focus.

So over the years that's what we did. We had very particular things that were meant for digging deeper. New cell groups started, worship teams started their own bible studies, the Wednesday bible studies, WOW (Women of the Word), Men's Breakfast – all this to help us grow deeper. And then we had to reach further. We started Corporate Capsules which was a ministry to the corporate world, PLACE which is the Programme for Leadership Advancement and Continuing Education, workplace

initiatives. It was wonderful to see all that God was doing both in us growing deeper in the Word, but also in seeing the scope that He gave us.

Then COVID came, and all of a sudden, we were all confined to our homes. And yet, through that time, God used every instrument for His glory. We always used to say how the internet was fueling so much of bad stuff. But God took it and He made it useful for Himself. So, while COVID brought many people to a halt, it didn't stop the church. The church continued to thrive even in that situation. We saw tremendous growth, amazing things happening as we had Bible studies and prayers on Zoom. I remember looking at a bible study one day and we had crossed a hundred on the Zoom link, and that meant there were at least 2 or 3 in every home – unheard of numbers. Never has a physical bible study had so many people. And that's what God was doing. God brought so much of emotional healing as well. He was ministering so powerfully to the body during that time. God took those two years and said: It may have been meant for evil, but I can make something good come out of it. And He did that in each one of us.

Then our 25th year came just after Covid, and we asked ourselves the question: What does God have for us as we look at 26 years and counting? Is there a new focus? Is there a new imperative that He has for us? We have prayed through this last year, individually as leaderships, small groups, and through many conversations that we have had. It seems to be that there's an urgency upon us for engagement with the Word – to make sure that our faith is visible.

James 2:14-26 James is very straightforward, both in what he wants us to understand from it and the language. Unlike Paul's language which is so cloaked in theology where every sentence is something that you can unpack.

¹⁴What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? ¹⁷Even so faith, if it has no works is dead, being by itself.

¹⁸But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me. Your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." ¹⁹You believe that God is one. you do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. ²⁰But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? ²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²²You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

That's as strong a statement as you can read in the bible. Then we have Paul in the background saying that you have been justified by faith alone. Are Paul and James contradicting each other? No, They are not. We are justified by faith alone, believing in the finished work of Calvary is what brings salvation to us. James is saying that this faith that we have must be visible, it must be tangible, and it must be able to be seen by people around us, not so much by the words that we speak but by the works that we do. That's why Jesus Himself said: Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify My Father. That's the whole thrust of what James is saying here. He says: "Your faith must be visible or else it's a dead faith." The consequence of what you believe in your heart must be that you have good works that are around you. That is the cry of this time that we are in, that God is placing upon us this responsibility that we will have a faith that is visible to everybody. Not a hidden faith, not a closet faith but a faith that is clearly visible to everyone.

I was reading a book this past week by Rob Staples titled "Outward Sign and Inward Grace". Some of you may realize that's a line out of John Wesley. He believed the sacraments to be that, as we celebrate the two sacraments in the Protestant Church, which are the table of the Lord and Baptism, they are outward signs of an inward work of grace. I believe that is what God is calling us to, that this inward grace that He has given us in our lives must begin to manifest itself to people all around us.

Take Peter for example. In Acts 4, he and John met the paralyzed man and they said to him, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have, I give thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." The leaders there don't know what to make of it. They look at this man and they say: We cannot deny that this is a miracle. We know that this man used to sit crippled, but now he walks. We can't deny the miracle, we can't deny the manifestation. What do we do with them? Then in 4:18 When they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them: whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge. But we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard. We cannot stop speaking of what we have seen and heard. There is going to be a visible manifestation of what we have seen and heard. We know Jesus, we have experienced Him. We have walked with Him, and what we did is through His power. We are not going to keep quiet. It is impossible for us to be quiet.

Rufus McDaniel wrote a hymn about a hundred years back that captures this.

What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought
Since Jesus came into my heart!
I have light in my soul for which long I had sought,
Since Jesus came into my heart!

The inward grace that had been planted in Peter and John manifested and when they were told to quiet down, they said, "It's impossible to do that. We have to do what we are supposed to do. It's impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard.

So the question for us is: What is the outward sign of that inward grace in our lives? What are people seeing? What are you showcasing about what you have seen about Jesus and heard about Jesus. What's the outward sign? For them it was not possible to keep quiet about the things that they'd seen and heard. Take Jairus, in Luke 8:49-56, Jesus raises His daughter from the dead. She's lifeless and then He brings her back. And then He says a strange thing to them. He says, "Tell nobody about it."

Don Francisco wrote a song many years ago. It said, "I've got to tell somebody, what Jesus did for me." That was the refrain for the whole narration about Jairus. "How can I keep quiet. He's done a wonderful work in my life. I've got to tell somebody." A beautiful, energetic song; it's on YouTube. It begs the question: what do we do? What do we say? How can I not tell people what Jesus has done for me. He healed my daughter; he brought her back from the dead." I was reminded about the things that God has done in my life. Am I sharing it enough? I have a few times. I felt the Lord saying: If you're going to preach about it, you also need to bring yourself there and talk about the things that He has done in your life. And I said, I will, Lord.

Twenty-three years back, I had a back problem. The MRI showed that I had four herniated discs in my back. I was in intense agony. No amount of pain medication that I took relieved it. I had forgotten what it was to live a life without pain. I had lost all strength in my left hand; I couldn't lift anything. In fact, there is a picture of me holding only the communion glass with somebody else holding the tray,

because I couldn't hold the tray and the cup. I was like this for 6 months. We tried everything; I went to doctors here and in Chennai, to no avail. Then one day, the church decided to fast and pray for my healing. I woke up that morning completely free of pain. I couldn't believe it. And I have not had a problem for 23 years. They told me I would never be able to carry a suitcase or even a briefcase. I travel everywhere with a full 23 kilos that Air India allowed, carrying my own luggage. Look what the Lord has done! We've got to. Tell somebody what God has done for you. Has He touched you, healed or delivered you?

What is the visible outward sign of what God has done for you, that inward grace that has touched you? Many of you have known Him as a healer. How many people have heard your testimony – inside the church, outside the church? Because by being able to share it to people who don't know God, then they get interested in this God – would He do the same for me? Of course, He would! He will. What is the outward sign of that inward grace?

2 Kings 4:1-7 A widow comes to Elisha; she's just lost her husband who was one of the prophets, and she says, "You've got to help me. I have no money and the creditors have come." In those days, if you didn't have the money, they took your children. She says, "I have nothing." He says, "No! What do you have?" to which she replied, "I have little oil." He said, "Get pots and pans and start pouring it out." And she poured and she poured, and she poured, until there were no more pots. And I love this line from Tommy Tenny: Heaven didn't run out of oil; earth ran out of pots. That's who God is. He never runs out. "When the pots and pans were full, they had no more pots, then the oil stopped," is what the bible says. And how many of us have looked at the last note and wondered if we can get through the month? Have you? Wondered where school fees were going to come from? Wondered where house rent was going to come from? Wondered if you'd ever make it to the end of the month? And yet, at the end of the month, you looked at yourself and you said, "How did it happen? How? God's faithfulness. He is the great multiplier, not only of oil, but five loaves and two fish and whatever you have. He's the great multiplier and He's given that to us. What is the outward manifestation of what He has done? How does it show out? How is it getting manifested. What's the outward sign?

Luke's gospel 7:36 Mary with the alabaster vial – just loving adoration of wonderful manifestation! What an outward sign of what Jesus had done for her inwardly. He says, "Those who are forgiven much, will love more. He has forgiven each one of us. If we look at our lives, we know that God has forgiven us. There are things in each of our lives that is so personal. I've never shared it with anybody because it is so dark and stained and yet, I took it to the Lord and He wiped it clean. He's done that, and so how does that manifest? And what must be the outward sign of this incredible grace that He has shown?

I truly believe that this generation will only meet the Lord when they see visible tangible signs of your faith and mine. And I'm not in any way knocking evangelism. I'm just saying that this is what is going to be, it's turned topsy-turvy. Today it's going to be questions like that. Why do you do that? why have you helped me? Why didn't you respond in kind like the way you were treated? Why don't you compromise just once? How can you love someone like that?

And we'll have only one answer – the love of God constraineth me. Many times I have told you that that word in the Greek is so difficult to translate. That's why when you look at different versions, they all use different words: the love of God constraineth me, the love of God controls me, the love of God compels me, the love of God impels me. Why? Because that particular Greek word has a dual connotation. One connotation is that you are held in a vice by the love of God, and the second is that there's a forward movement to that grip. So you're not only held but you're led. The love of God constraineth us, beloved. That's how the outward signs will get manifested of the inward grace that

God has so generously and graciously bestowed upon us. And for this generation to see that, you and I need to make our faith visible, not inside the church but outside in the world. They need to see and know that we are Christians by the way in which we love. The love of God constraineth me.

Again, if I can harp back to things that happened in my day, there was a movie that came out called Grease. Some of you may know it; some of you are scared to nod with me and that tells me that you're in my age bracket. But one of the songs in that was "Tell me more, tell me more." Beloved, that's the refrain we need to hear from around us as we share with them what God has done for us, that they are so caught up with it that they say, "Tell me more, tell me more. What else? Tell me again, anything else happened. I want to know." And we get an opportunity to introduce the one who has changed our life so beautifully, and bestowed the grace that continues to work within us in such beautiful ways. The key words for us are just this: a manifested faith, a visible faith, a tangible faith that is know to people all around us. That, I believe, is the call on us today.
