

One of the truths of our faith is that when we say “yes” to God’s call in our lives to be a prophet, the mission will often entail many challenges. But through those challenges, so much good can come about when we serve God and help others find Him.

When she was 10 years old, Darlene McIntosh was so moved by the words of a missionary that she told God she would go wherever He wanted her to go. But what she did not know was how costly that would be.

Years later as an adult, she met and married another missionary speaker, Russell Diebler, getting married on August 18, 1937. She was on her way to New Guinea, an island north of Australia, Russell had pioneered missions work there in unreached parts of the island and nearly lost his life several times doing so. But both of them shared a mission, namely, wanting to share the love of God with those who had never heard of God.

It was hard work, and even though some of the natives on the island of (the Kapaukus) had never seen a white woman before, they took an instant liking to Darlene. She and Russell lived in a small house made out of

bamboo poles and made friends with the people, telling them about the Lord.

Life though soon began to unravel as her team heard of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on the radio. World War II soon spread and the Japanese invaded New Guinea, and Darlene and her husband were forced to move to a nearby island. They worked in a mission Bible school there until it became too dangerous to stay. Then Darlene and Russell had to escape to the mountains with the other missionaries. They were able to take along only a few belongings.

Unfortunately, the missionaries weren't safe in the mountains. Japanese soldiers soon came and took away all the men except an elderly doctor to a prison camp. Russell along with most other men in their compound were separated from the women and loaded into trucks for transport to a prison camp across the island called Pare Pare. Seeing this, Darlene ran to pack Russell a few things in his pillowcase before bidding him farewell. As the truck pulled away, Russell's parting words to his wife quoted Hebrews 13:5, "Remember one thing, dear: God said that He would never leave us nor

forsake us.” Little did Darlene know that those would be the last words she would ever hear from her husband. The day was March 13, 1942.

For a year, Darlene and the others that remained were forced to stay where they were. They had little food. Darlene drew strength from the doctor’s deep quiet faith, and looked at him like a father. But after a year they were all taken to another prison camp run by a cruel commander who would even beat and kick women and girls for the smallest of reasons. The prisoners worked hard, long days even though they were fed a poor diet and often ill. The conditions were awful; there were rats and flies and poor healthcare. There were air raids to worry about on top of that. And when she heard of her husband’s passing from another family, one can only imagine how devastated Darlene must have been. But through it all, she clung to her faith, and she recalled the parting words from her husband, to be a soldier for Christ. As such, she decided to be a person of hope in that camp.

Darlene was eventually moved to a different camp, one notorious for its horror where she faced solitary confinement and intense interrogation. Thinking Darlene an American spy, the Japanese interrogated her every

few days hoping to uncover evidence worthy of execution. Even though diseased, alone, malnourished, and extremely uncomfortable, Darlene battled for Christ. She gave the other prisoners hope, leading them in prayers and Bible reading. Her actions there even inspired a commander of the camp, seeing how others respected her; this commander even tried to comfort her after he learned of the loss of her husband. Darlene decided to minister to him, telling this commander of Jesus dying for him and that she did not hate him or any other Japanese people. By the time she had finished, the commander had tears running down his cheeks he was so moved by her mercy.

Unfortunately though others, the secret police, saw her with suspicion. One day guards led her out of the compound and drove her to a secret police headquarters. She was forced to sign an official government statement and ate what she gathered to be her last meal. They led her into another room where she saw her executor begin to draw his sword, and she prepared to meet her Maker.

In this moment, Darlene reflected that the Lord brought song lyrics to her mind, "I'll live for Him who died for me!" She wrote of the experience, "I felt

confused by the message of the song. ‘Lord is this the deliverance— deliverance into Your presence by way of the sword? Isn’t this a strange song when I’m going to die?’” At that moment a car screeched to a halt at the front of the building, and before she knew it, she was being whisked away by other officials and returned to her previous camp. God delivered her from death.

When Darlene had returned home after WWII, she still wanted desperately to return to the islands. She had met Jerry Rose and they had married in 1948 and in 1949 she and Jerry returned together. Jerry was already under appointment to the mission field of Papua New Guinea and side by side they worked together raising their two young sons, Bruce and Brian, teaching, preaching, building landing strips, delivering babies, standing against headhunters and leading them to Christ. Then in 1978, they met another challenge when they moved to the Outback of Australia.

In 2003 and in their 80’s, Darlene & Jerry, having returned to the States some years earlier, settled into a retirement center in Tennessee. They slowed down but never retired, always ready in season and out of season to inspire and encourage those they came in contact with to know the Lord.

What Darlene was was a prophet who undertook a difficult mission, but also refused to let despair take over her life. And in this, she brought others to Christ and strengthened the faith of others.

This third Sunday of Advent we focus in on John the Baptist, with whom we share a lot in common with for like him, we are people sent from God into the world with a mission, to point to the Lord.

Like Darlene, John the Baptist's mission was difficult; he left what would have been a comfortable life as the son of a Temple priest to go into the desert. He would challenge people including Herod who would have him killed. But he did all of this to bring people to God, and knowing that God had a Savior who would eventually come. So how do we do this in our lives? The answer is through being a person of joy and hope, through not being afraid to live out the faith in word and action, and through having a mindset that we do it all for the glory of God vs. ourselves.

One of the reflections on Darlene was entitled "joy disrupts disruptions."

The author, Kathleen Cookie, an actress, speaker and writer, reflected:

"What others in the camp took to be a forsaken prison and death camp, she

chose to see as a place for her to be a soldier for Christ. So, she soldiered onward. Darlene steeled herself and chose to cling to God's promises. His promises brought hope – the eternal Hope. She would never succumb to abandoning her trust in her Lord and Savior no matter how inhuman her torture. God had called her to battle the enemies of the world, both seen and unseen. She chose instead to take on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-18) fully day and night.

Such is the power of hope. Over the years I've known some amazingly joyful people who have faced really tough situations, such as my grandmother Pat battling pancreatic cancer but well before that dealing with kidney issues and knee issues, but always having this smile every time you'd see her, always caring about her family. I've seen people embrace difficult situations like Darlene; facing health issues, or other tough situations. But in these moments, like Darlene in that camp, or like people like Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan who was the last bishop of Saigon before it fell who spent years in a North Vietnamese prison and who brought hope there through his kindness even converting guards; or Saint Rita who was married to a cold, cruel man who eventually converted because of her, hope and joy have such power. So a starting point is to look at our attitude.

Do we see the world as something to just escape from? Do we lose hope in people or ourselves? Do we get so frustrated we just turn inward and escape into social media, or our hobbies? Do we give up when things don't work out as we want right away? Do we give up on people in our family who are making poor choices? What attitude do we have around our spouses, our parents, our kids? Next week we will hear how the people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light; and this reminds us God does not give up on us. God sees our potential, because God knows there is good in us. Hopefully we do as well and know that an attitude of joy and hope, of believing in ourselves and encouraging others through hope can do so much to change hearts and minds. The power of positivity, of joy, can do so much to change a home, to lift the heart, and to give people hope and comfort.

Second, like John, how do we point to the light? Like John, we are a prophet; we point to Jesus. One way we do that is through our attitude of joy, but we are also prophets through our deeds and actions. Darlene refused to be afraid to talk about her faith, which is why she went to the ends of the earth to tell others about Christ, and even told her captors about Christ. Both her actions and her words testified to her belief. Her late



husband Russell, is an example of this as well as her. One comfort Darlene received after hearing of Russell's death was his impact on other prisoners. He taught the Bible regularly, cared for men deeply, and made many feel as if Christ Himself were present in the POW camp. Many shared how a Christmas service led by Russell had bolstered their wavering faith and one man reported that he came to Christ that day after hearing the message Russell delivered. Lasting fruit came from the darkest trial. Russell Deibler would also trek through uncharted territory to reach a new people group. Russell's feet were in awful shape, often injured; Darlene had to repeat the process of tending to them—a nauseating routine. Dr. Jaffray witnessed Russell's plight and wrote about it in *The Pioneer*, a missions journal:

“This morning I looked at the bleeding feet of a missionary, his wife tending them, the blood and pus running, and I thought to myself, ‘What a nauseating sight that is!’ But, as I walked from the room, the Lord kept saying to me, ‘Oh, but to Me they are beautiful feet!’ Then I remembered – ‘How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bringeth good tidings – ‘good tidings to those men and women in New Guinea who sit in darkness and the shadow of death... Some day the last one will turn to Jesus. Then the clouds will part asunder and our Savior will be there!’”

We can be tempted to think that our trials divert us from the path of God for our lives instead of as being the path for our lives. This rang true in Darlene's war experience and for so many saints in history, but nowhere more clearly than Christ on the cross. God can and will turn our trials to gold, for us and for others. Though we are far removed from Palestine of 2,000 years ago, and the prison camps Darlene was in, the one thing that is the same in every age is the need for hope. People need a message of hope, that death is not the end, that poverty, disease, hunger, fear and hate will not have the last word, and that the path to true happiness is not doing what you want when you want, or having money or power but looking at your life and heeding the words of the Baptist, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." So many, perhaps even ourselves sometimes on our earthly journey, if they were to meet a modern day John the Baptist, might respond with mocking or ignoring the message. The challenge for us is to be a modern day John the Baptist like Darlene; to be victims of mockery and intense dislike, for this is what it means to be a prophet. To not give up on the world, on people who are making bad choices, especially within our families, to see past the sin and bad choices on the surface and to remember how deeply God loves all peoples but needs us as messengers.

It is anything but easy to be a voice crying in the desert, saying a message that is counter-cultural. But when we do this, we change hearts and minds.

And lastly through it all, may we never forget why we do these things.

Darlene Deibler Rose did not go to the ends of the earth and then spend the rest of her life working as a missionary for her own glory. Like John, she, and all good prophets know they are not Jesus. Sometimes ego can set in even as we try to be a prophet; that desire for power or control. John teaches us incredible humility; Jesus says John is the greatest ever born of a woman in describing the Baptist, but John says powerfully he is not worthy to even untie the sandal straps of Jesus, something a low-level slave would do. As we go about the work of being a prophet and living out our vocation, may we always remember God sees the good work we do, and if we don't get a lot of recognition or payback, that is OK, because we do prophecy and live out our mission for God's glory and to point others toward the Lord.

As we wrap up Advent and prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord next weekend, may we stand shoulder to shoulder with John the Baptist, saying Oh Come, Oh Come Emmanuel and Ransom Captive Israel. With John, let

us remember we are not a savior, but we are a voice crying out in the wilderness who like John, are unworthy to untie the sandal straps of the Lord, but like John, are loved and called by the Lord. We need a Savior in our lives for we can't save ourselves on our own, and that is a message we need to embrace but proclaim to a world so much in need of hope and direction. With John, let us through our lives testify to the light, pointing with our whole lives towards Jesus by helping the world to find Him.