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SPEAKER: Bishop Festo Kivengere  
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Well thank you very much brother-in-Christ. We appreciate this kind of gathering so that we can we can give you, not just an information, the purpose of the background is that you may see the context in which God has worked, and we don't claim anything special, because there was nothing special about the church in Uganda, it is just the body of Christ made up of human beings who fail here, and succeed there, and so on. So there is no sort of ideal church. We had our fears, we had our worries, we had anxieties, we had little tensions, these were all there, and persecution, actually, accentuates them. So, it is not an easy run, it isn't a smooth run, but I want to tell you the secret. What is the secret of a community like that growing, churches filling up, when threats are all round and danger is actually imminent, and there is no way of saying, "Here I am secure physically."? No courts of law to protect your rights at all. Amin's men can come armed, and they did come armed and they took some of the top lawyers of Uganda from courts, shot them outside with their clients, just to make it clear, no court. Amin himself told me when I was protesting before him, in 1973, before he executed 12 Ugandans, the first executions. He said, "I am the highest court." He said to me, "I am the highest court. My defense council has made me the highest court. I have the final word." And imagine, one man who knows that 12 million Ugandans are absolutely in his hands. He can kill if he wants to kill, he can do anything he likes. Too much power.

And this is the situation in which the church had to speak the truth. That was just almost like madness, that you should go forward like my Arch-Bishop Janani Luwum, and the rest of us Bishops, warned

by his soldiers, "Don't go to him, he's a madman, he'll kill you all." But we said, "Kill or no kill, we have to go to him because we are pastor's of our people, and our people are being killed anyway." So what is the difference. We go to him." So we did go, and God protected us. But what is the secret? In words from the New Testament, and this is the little word, but very powerful word which I think takes our faith together and gives it that ability to cope with situations which are utterly beyond human power. I believe the secret lies in how our faith began, if you don't mind, let me take you back. The christian faith began in a very strange way, didn't it? That it should have began outside a city, in the midst of violence, political opportunism, unfeeling kind of sadism, if you like, of enjoying to people to suffering, that's where it all began, outside Jerusalem. Absolute helplessness. You name it, it was there. It was on someone, humanly speaking, a very helpless person, divine power, of course, was there, but the demonstration on the cross was of a human, or human helplessness.

If there is any sign which should have produced despair, it is the cross, and yet we know the results of that cross are the very opposite of what the results should normally have been, for the cross crosses out despair. Having gone through that, if our faith was born in that way, in that weather of tough, deep confusion, of violence, of politicians playing their cards for opportunistic reasons, of soldiers doing what they don't understand, of mobs shouting, a faith which was born like that, when it penetrates the heart in the power of the Holy Spirit, that

heart becomes absolutely invincible. And I think that was the power of my Arch-Bishop, he was very human. Janani was very human, very loving, very compassionate, he would get very angry against evil, and at the same time he would stand almost like a rock and look Amin in the eye and say, "Your Excellency, I am praying for you." There was something which you can't call just courage, and this is it. And I want to read a verse, because I think it is good to know the kind of tough strain we've gone through, and what sustained this weak community, with hardly much to fall back to in literature, as Bishop Kauma told you. Most of our people are not readers, and therefore, they didn't have much outwardly, externally to fall back to, but they came out a beautiful community simply because the risen Lord, the Head of the church was enthroned in the hearts of His people. And He, always, is ahead of any situation. And He gives people that extraordinary ability of singing when they should be weeping, of coming out when they should be hiding. Of showing a hopeful joy, a joy full, a hope full of joy when they should really be absolutely miserable. You see widows carrying their little babies, and yet smiling. In some of our churches you can look in the first two rows in the front, and you can count twenty, sixty young widows whose husbands were brutally murdered, they are left with children to look after. And you can't, under those circumstances how can you explain that? But you see them rejoicing, clapping, in the usual African way when God fills their hearts.

If you look at them you would never detect that they are helpless widows, you sense they are coping with life, they are full

of life, they are winning others to Jesus Christ. So I thought I'd just read this very familiar passage to you because this has been a tremendous passage in our church. 2nd Corinthians, you know the words, 2nd Corinthians chapter 5:14; "We are ruled by the love of Christ," says Paul. "Now that we recognise that one man died for everyone, which means that we all share in His death," or that they were all dead, "He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but only for Him who died and was raised to life for their sake ." I believe that in those wonderful words of the apostle you have a <sup>e</sup>secret. Here is a church under the control of liberating love, the love of Christ. Not a church blind, not a church hiding, not a church escaping, but a church actually in exposure, and a church really vulnerable. In other words, stepping forward when people are miserable, speaking to a dictator, and therefore, becoming open to his hatred. So that there was no way this church could hide. They had no way of hiding. Having preached to these people, having helped them pastorally, that God loved them, that they are children of God, that Christ died and rose for them, that the Spirit of God dwells in them, you have given them such a dignity that once they lose their rights, you cannot keep your mouth.

You've lifted them to such a high height, they are children of God. They are God's important people, no matter whether they are in rags and tatters, that does not make any difference. Christ loved, died for them. Now, once that becomes a pastor's conviction, then once they suffer you are going to be vulnerable. Then when their rights are trampled under foot, you are going to be there.

And that's what happened to our Arch-Bishop, that's what happened, is happening in many areas, leave alone that extreme example of our Arch-Bishop there are other situations in which you are going to be involved. A Pastor in South Africa, I was preaching in Soweto last year, I passed in South Africa, here are millions of blacks being treated as under-dogs. And now the Pastor stands on Sunday, "God loved you. You are children of God." And then what? Go and sit back? Or are you going to be in that rough, sweaty situation with the Lord, because the Lord is there with them. In other words, your preaching has a way of giving God's people their true, dignified identity. But having given the message, then the message must be incarnate. It must take on flesh and blood, and this is what we found. We found ourselves being pushed into the arena.

I want to tell you, this is the secret. He, Christ, having died for all makes them all redeemable, and the purpose why He wants them to be redeemed is very simple, "that they may no longer live for themselves in the prison of self-centeredness, and self-security, and self-complacency, but that they may now live for Him." That's life. When Janani went to die, I am told by a christian man who was in the dungeon at that moment, one of the eight Ugandans who were going, waiting to die, when the Arch-Bishop was brought last at about six thirty, or at about that time, he came between two soldiers leading him to the place where he was shot dead, before his body was taken to another place to have a car ran over so that they may say he was ran over by a car. When he entered this dungeon of the house of torture, he found

these Ugandans. He asked permission from the soldiers, he said, "I want to pray for these men." And he stopped there, swollen, because he had been under torture for the last three hours before Amin, beaten up, wounded, his cassock full of blood and so forth, and he stood and he raised his tired hands, and he blessed the eight. And the man who was there said to me, "Bishop, I shall never forget what I saw. My Arch-Bishop praying for me when blood was coming down his cheeks, his face all swollen," and this man said, "He very much looked like his Lord."

And that's tough. Of course, that is extreme example, but that shows you the kind of ability I'm talking about. When pain, when suffering, when misery, when pressures fail to disarm a christian man, in such a way that he can bless others when he himself should be thinking about his suffering. So, He died for all to release them from living for themselves, to release them from living for themselves, so that they may live for Him who died and rose again for them. And then when they are released, verse 19 says, "He has given you the message of reconciliation." Released from our self-centeredness, then we become ambassadors of His reconciling love. And this is the kind of ministry we have been running with in Uganda. Christians released from hatred and it's very close. We have got people in Uganda determined to get equal with Amin's men. We have got people who say, "They killed my uncle, I will pay back." "They killed my father, I will pay back." And we, our message is, "You are going to be imprisoned. There is no way out there. It's a dead end of the road. Accept the love of Christ so that then you may minister healing to the wounded, to

the broken-hearted ones, to the broken homes, broken neighbourhoods, minister. And when you see our people singing and praising and shouting, and going village to village, and testifying, all sorts of people, these crowds of little men and women. They are beautiful. Really released.

And we still are not over, for we are still in a changing political situation in Africa, and in Africa, like any other part of the world, if you speak the truth and the truth hurts a politician, you're in trouble. You are in bad books. We know that, we've been involved in it again and again, and therefore we're not through. We're not through unless, of course, we preferred never to say anything, but you can't. You heard the Bishops and other religious leaders went to see our President, simply to remind him of the dangerous security. When they go, they go to help the President not to destroy him. They want him to wake up, use his authority, grasp the situation, save precious lives. But many times politicians don't look at it that way, they think you are speaking about a sensitive thing, and you are therefore dangerous to them. Instead of knowing you are trying to help them to fight this terrible, destructive tread which opportunists enjoy usually. So, we have a message of reconciliation. I'm sure you have it here.

I mentioned South Africa. It is needed there ever so badly. Racial tensions, isolations, alienations of people from one another and from God. Bitterness. We see it in Uganda, they told you. You can see it in Zimbabwe after independence, there are still deep wounds to be healed in the community. And then we have come to your country to find, you haven't got an Amin, you haven't got a situation

of Uganda, but you are getting riots. People who are bitter, tired of feeling as if they are non-entities for a long time. And they build on it, and it builds up until it just needs a little match and it phewww, it goes. The church here needs that realistic message of God's reconciling love in which your people will rediscover their true identity. And in discovering the true identity. And in discovering the true identity then they can share. You may not give. It's not a question of giving things, this is a disease which has permeated modern society, give, give. It's not a question of giving things. Cold money has never restored any man's identity. You can feed me and I still commit suicide. What I need is your warm hand. I want you to be incarnate in love, because if you love me at that level, you restore my identity. You may not give me money, you may not give me food, but you've given me yourself. And that's very costly, isn't it? It's not easy, because you may lose your security by doing that.

So, I want to stop there. → Sorry we've given only two . . .  
Thank you for listening.

*Transcribed by Vicky Wilson*

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