

Shine as a Light

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

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Last Sunday after the Epiphany - 10 February 2013

Exodus 34:29-35, Psalm 99, 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2, Luke 9:28-36

Last Sunday was an amazing day wasn't it!? Such a wonderful day and a celebration of faith and hope. For those that were not here we had 5 baptisms, 5 confirmations and 1 reception into the Anglican Church. At a meeting during the week that I attended Bishop Trevor our celebrant for the day called it 'very moving'. He was right - boy did we move - up and down the church, around the font, to the sanctuary and out the door. It was like a choreographed dance of the journey of faith. Didn't the Holy Spirit move?! Many comments were made later about the amount of water that I splashed around.

Baptisms are special occasions for all of us - not just for the person being baptised but for every one there who identifies as a follower of Christ. It reminds us of our commitment or lack of commitment. It encourages us to continue on the path, the way of Christ. There is a moment in the service when we light a candle and say to the person, "God has brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father".

Shine as a light. That's a pretty tall order when you think about it. What does that mean? How on earth do we mere mortals shine as a light? Does that mean we are to wear our church or faith affiliation like a neon light, saying 'look here' 'look at me' 'look at this'? In our present cultural climate being 'out' as a Christian is quite daunting. At the very least there are strange glances and perplexed looks. At the worst there is outright abuse. There is often misunderstanding. I have lost count of the atheist and agnostic pieces I have read where the writers seem to display an infallible conviction that they know exactly what the Christian church is about. Furthermore if they do admit that they don't understand it they assume it is because it is nonsense anyway!

I have an extended family member who has been waiting for a number of years for me to lose my faith. The fact that it has grown stronger, even though there have been ups and downs is a complete puzzle for them.

The media doesn't help us in all of this either. As the ABC religion journalist put it at a seminar I attended, the media are only interested in two aspects of religion, actually two aspects of anything - controversy and violence. That explains for me why the Australian Christian Lobby - who by the way are not formally affiliated with any church or denomination - get airtime and moderate religious voices are never heard. Of course the difficulties we encounter with shining as the light of Christ are nothing compared with what people in other countries must confront. To be Christian in some places is a matter of life and death.

What do we do then about this? How can we be true to our baptismal vows in our various contexts? Do we do what Moses did? Do we put take veil over our light? On again, off again, Moses had to cover his face. When he went before the Lord his face was uncovered. When he came out to talk to the faithful his face was uncovered. The rest of the time it was veiled. On again, off again.

Of course shining as light is not about being a neon sign and it is certainly not about making us stand out. Being a light is not about us. Have I told you my wedding dress story? sometimes we have to let the little light of our ego dim so that God's glory may shine. If ever there was a moment when God's love was meant to be displayed it was as those two young people stood and vowed life long fidelity and love.

“Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father” we say.

Keeping your light ready, able to be available when needed, is not that easy. Most of the time I forget I am supposed to shine as the light of Christ! And I am the ordained person, trained, praying and theoretically equipped to lead others to Christ. I suspect most of us, most days, have to battle our way through daily struggles and frustrations. Some of us have to deal with feelings of guilt or inadequacy. Some of us have health problems, deal with anxiety, get worried and concerned about many things. Sometimes we are so weighted down we cannot even find the light let alone shine it in the right direction.

But I have good news. The clue is we do not have to anything except one thing. We don't have to coordinate putting the veil on and off. We don't have to push things aside and try and find the light buried beneath layers of worry and concern. We do not have to become evangelists and be able to describe our faith in a hundred words or less. It is all about *what* we gaze upon and *where* we direct our focus.

A phrase in the story of the transfiguration points us to *the* point of focus. After Jesus was transfigured, Moses and Elijah had been and gone, Peter has bumbled around in confusion and the

voice from the cloud had said, “this is my Son my chosen; Listen to him!” Jesus was found alone. Now the disciples saw Jesus only. They saw and were silent. In its original context this phrase meant that Moses (standing for the Law) and Elijah (standing for the prophets) had disappeared. Peter, James and John saw only Jesus. There was only Jesus. They no longer see and have confusion, fear and distractions. They no longer saw the past with old assumptions and ideas. Instead they saw Christ in all his glory, a glory that came from his direct connection with God. These three apostles went on to be transformed into courageous people of faith and purpose because all distractions were removed.

Paul earlier in 2 Corinthians says the he and his team are in Christ, standing in the presence of God. The great success of Paul’s ministry was that he focused on only one thing and preached only one thing - Jesus Christ. Paul could write, “*all of us are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another*”” For us, this focus on Jesus only with no distractions also results in transformation. And when there is a whole lot of us doing that as a community, well what a lot of reflected light that is bouncing around!

It happens because we are mirrors. That's it. We are mirrors. All we have to do is focus on Jesus Christ and reflect that light. What do we see when we focus on Jesus? That can depend on what is going on inside each of us yet if we immerse ourselves in his story over and over again, his teachings, his light, then I believe we begin to see love, compassion and forgiveness. We begin to see healing, wholeness, non-violence and courage. We begin to question and wonder and accept and live free. These things do not happen over night. At first we see dimly but one day, as Paul says, we see face to face.

The places where we can focus on Christ are many... Daily scripture reading, gathered around the altar and sharing in Holy Communion, praying and meditating, being attentive to the moment and the task at hand for Christ is in all and through all, I say the Jesus prayer as I ride my bike or swim!

St. Irenaeus, the second century Bishop of Lyons made a famous declaration – Gloria Dei vivens homo - “The glory of God is a human being fully alive; and to be alive consists in beholding God.” Eighteen hundred years ago Irenaeus nailed it. It is when we turn to Christ, when we behold God, when we keep our attention and desire on and for the way of Christ that we are free, fully alive and able to shine. There are other ways to bring God’s love and light to the world but this simple way, this one way, is a path that has been trodden by countless people for many centuries and the darkness has not overcome it - neither the darkness of the church at times in its history, nor the darkness of the world or the forces of evil, or our own inadequacies and ignorance.

This lent turn to Christ and let his light transform and guide you into peace and wholeness. Amen

Moses face shone because he had been talking with God. The great prophet and leader reflected God's glory. Paul in the Corinthian reading tells his readers that when someone turns to the Christ the Lord, the veil is removed. The glory of God is reflected in them and they are being transformed into the image of the Christ. We don't have to manufacture the light. We just have to point our gaze in the direction of Jesus. We just have to shut up and listen to him. I do not have to tell you we are not perfect instruments for transmitting divine light to the world. But we don't have to be perfect! We just need to make time to focus on Jesus our teacher and Lord and his Spirit, with our willingness, will do the rest in us.