

It Shines in Your Life

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A great thing happened at one of our three regional pastors' conferences this last fall that I hope you find encouraging.

Here's the story. At one of our pastors' conferences the supper is not included and the guys go out in groups of buddies to area restaurants. After that evening of the conference, the place where we were staying got a phone call from a restaurant server asking whom to contact to pass along a word of thanks. The front desk gave that person the name of the conference chairman who then received this email:

"Dear Mr. (Name), I'm not sure how to go about asking this information because it is all very vague, but this evening I had a group of men from your conference come into (Restaurant) for dinner and they absolutely touched me to the core. They were the most genuinely caring group I have ever met and so much fun, they just made my entire night. I wanted to send a thank you card. Is there an address that I could send a thank you to? I hope you all have a great rest of your conference and a safe trip back."

The conference chairman told us about it, found out who the pastors were, sent the server their names and contact info and added, *"By the way, we're in town for a Lutheran pastoral conference - so everyone at your table is a pastor somewhere in Chicagoland!"*

Let Your Light Shine

Those pastors and that server will probably never see each other again in this world. And those pastors weren't thinking about adding a member to their church; they simply let their light shine. And what did it cost them? Nothing – although I'm guessing they left a good tip.

Here's my point: they had nothing to gain by treating the person so well – not for their church, not for their personal profit, not for making themselves look good. They simply live with the love of God through his Son in their hearts, and it shows.

Not perfectly of course; they're all sinners, as are we all. But even imperfectly, they showed the love of Jesus in a very casual, one-time encounter with someone.

How about you? Are you patient with people in line at the grocery store? In traffic? With older people? With younger people? With people somehow different than you? The mirror of God's Law reflects back to me with a big "Not always and never perfectly."

But that's why God sent his Son Jesus, isn't it? Because we're never perfect and we're often evil – intentionally or not. We can't fix that; we can't make up for all the bad stuff and failures.

God's perfect Son did: one perfect man took God's wrath and died on a cross for all of us guilty ones. Then he came to life again, and God forgives all who trust not in themselves but in Jesus who died and rose again.

That means we will in the end stand before God and be declared "Not Guilty." What an irony, what a twist: the only innocent one is condemned and the guilty ones go free. So death will be dead, there will be no more sin or sorrow or sickness or pain. And it was all so expensive to our Savior and it's so totally free to us.

It Changes Everything

Eternal life in a perfect new creation awaits you; this changes everything. Does it show in your life? I know the pastors in the story from the restaurant. They're great guys. I also know they're sinners, although I'm considerably worse. And they let their light shine, just to give glory to their Savior and to bless their neighbor, a stranger.

Can you let your light shine in your everyday life? With your loved ones? (I know, I know.) With co-workers, bosses, classmates, strangers?

Sometimes it's easy, but often it's hard. Really hard. So why bother? Because it was unimaginably hard for Jesus to go to the cross for us undeserving sinners, and he did it anyway.

Do you think those pastors got some kind of reward for the way they treated the stranger? Of course they did: the reward of joy. But that's not why they did it, is it?

And here's one last thing.

We can, by God's grace, act that way as individuals, but we also can work at it to act that way as congregations. That's the entirety of New Starts...New Believer, our district's mission movement: Letting light shine, in the name of Jesus, in the presence of neighbors and strangers. Seeking the ones who don't come into our churches, going out to where they are. Doing something new, every congregation in the NID, to be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus out there with those waiting to hear of his love.

May God grant that for his glory and our neighbors' good.

