**This Little Light of Mine**

Do you ever think about the lights at your house? How many you have; the different kinds of lights; their different purposes. You probably have between 60 and 100 different lights not counting flashlights, etc. Some:

* work as one as in the family room or garage.
* work alone.
* are bright with multiple bulbs.
* are dim with low wattage or lumens.
* light up the outside.
* help in preparing meals or putting on make-up.
* enable reading at night.

The most important light in our house is not the brightest or largest. It’s actually probably the smallest with the least lumens. It’s the one that glows at night to prevent finding furniture with our toes. (Lisa says the most important light for me is the one in the refrigerator.)

The smallest light we have, the one that gives off the least lumens, has a task just as important as any other. If it didn’t serve, my toes would be in constant pain.

We sing the song, *This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine*. In the camp version we would sing:

* *Hide it under a bushel? No! I’m gonna let it shine.*
* *Won’t let Satan blow it out. I’m gonna let it shine.*
* *Shine all over our town. I’m gonna let it shine.*
* *Let is shine ‘til Jesus comes. I’m gonna let it shine.*

Let’s ask ourselves this morning if we’re really letting our little light shine.

Throughout 2018 we’ve been emphasizing external focus of ministry. We’ve encouraged Agape Christian Church to be involved in reaching out into our community with the love of Christ. We ended the year blessing two families with a merry Christmas that they wouldn’t have had without our help.

Also in 2018 we celebrated our volunteers whose individual lights make our church a bright shining light. We highlighted, encouraged, and thanked those who serve. We’re not the biggest light in town, but for a congregation of our size we have a huge impact.

We also challenged every individual in our church let your little light shine. We didn’t say anything about how big your light should be or whether it shines mostly in the context of the church or in the greater community. We emphasized, *Everyone, let your little light shine, let it shine, let it shine*.

I’ve been around long enough to know that some lights don’t shine, because:

* *I don’t have a big enough light to make a difference*
* *I don’t know enough*
* *I’m not talented enough*
* *I’m too old; too young; too tired*

My problem is simple. I love my job and I want my light to shine, but I don’t have the charisma of Andy Stanley or Tim Keller. I don’t have the creativity of Jud Wilhite or Francis Chan.

When these guys speak people line up to get a front row seat. Invite one of them to an event and you’re assured of a full house. I don’t have that effect on people. Anything they write is published and becomes a best seller. Not so with what I write.

The issue is not do I have the kind of light that these guys have? The issue is, do I let the little light I do have shine.

We live in a “bigger is better” culture. The more people who buy your album the better singer you must be. The more books you sell the better your message must be. The more people follow you on Instagram the more important you must be. The bigger the church the better it must be.

This mindset leads people to think, *My little light is so small, no one’s going to miss it if I keep it to myself*. And so I stub my toe on a coffee table while walking in the dark, and it hurts all the way up my leg and into my brain.

I have a very simple message today: It’s not how great is your light that matters. It’s how willing are you to let your little light shine.

When Tommy Oaks first started coming to our church he did a sermon about Moses and the staff he used as an aid for many displays of God’s power. Tommy went out before the service and found a stick like this one to use as a prop for his message. Who can still remember the mantra he used? *This is just a rod, a stick, a piece of wood*.

For example, when God first called Moses from the burning bush Moses want to let his light shine. *Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?* Exodus 3:11 He then raised some objections: *They won’t believe me! Pharaoh won’t listen to me*.

So God focused Moses’ attention on the simplest thing, his shepherd’s staff. Shepherds were known to keep a staff with them at all times. Moses may have carried this one for the 40 years he was a shepherd. But that’s all it was, a rod, a stick, a piece of wood.

God told him to throw it on the ground. When he did it turned into a snake. “Nahash” could refer to any of a number of venomous snakes. God told him to pick it up by the tail and it became a stick once again. Then God said, *Go. Let your little light shine*.

Another example, when God punished the Egyptians with the Ten Plagues, He told Moses to wave that stick over the land or water. Then God sent gnats or frogs to cover the land, or He caused the water to turn into blood. There was no magic in the stick. It was tool through which God showed His power until Pharaoh loosened his grip on God’s people and let them go.

Again, after Pharaoh let the Jews go he changed his mind and chased after them. When he caught up to them they were trapped between the world’s greatest army and the great Red Sea. God told Moses to hold that stick over the water. The water parted and the Jews crossed on dry ground. It wasn’t the stick that parted the water. It was God using the stick.

At Rephidim the people desperately needed water. God had Moses touch a large rock with that stick and water poured out. Can you imagine the sight, enough water to slake the thirst of over a million people gushing out of a rock?

Later, when Israel was threatened by the Amalekites God gave Israel a huge victory as long as Moses held that stick aloft.

Think about the mighty ways God used that simple stick.

**If God can use a stick like that, doesn’t it make sense that He can use your little light?**

Maybe you are too old or too young. Maybe you are too tired or you don’t know enough or don’t have enough talent. If God can display such power through a stick, don’t you think God can show His power through you? Are you less than a stick?

That stick of Moses had to become the “stick of God”. In the same way, you have to become the “you of God”. The Bible emphasizes that much can come from little if that little is committed to God.

* One man with a simple message could turn a city of 120,000 people to God.
* Two fish and five small loaves of bread could feed over 5000 people.
* One old man with a stick could lead a nation of over a million people through a desert into a rich and bountiful land.

Is Rod Nielsen the “Rod Nielsen of God”? Apply this to yourself. Put your name in here:

Is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of God”?

If I am committed to be the “Rod Nielsen of God” it doesn’t matter if I am in a big place or a small place. In the words of Francis Schaeffer from whom I learned a lot of my Christian philosophy, *As there are no little people in God’s sight, so there are no little places*.

Committed to God means that I let my little light shine, being whatever He wants me to be, wherever He wants me to be. It means letting my little light shine for His purpose, not mine.

The American ideal of bigger is better doesn’t translate into the Kingdom of God. Not only does God never teach that size and spiritual power go together, Jesus specifically warned us to be careful not to choose a place too big for ourselves.

*You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.* Mark 10:42-45

The rest of the world emphasizes bigness. Jesus emphasized, let your little light shine by serving. The world emphasizes being important and having an important title. Jesus emphasized, *You don’t need a special title. You’re all brothers*. (Matthew 23:8)

The shining light of the church isn’t about hierarchy with rulers and followers. It’s about brothers and sisters in equal but different ministry roles. Not all are teachers. Not all are musicians. Not all are directors. But all are called to ministry.

*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* Matthew 5:16

Do you remember the scene when Jesus washed His disciples’ feet at the Last Supper? It was a very humbling experience for those men to have their Lord do a slave’s task for them. I noticed something in that story. Jesus ended by saying, *Now that you know these things, you will be happy if you do them*. John 13:17

That’s not about washing feet. It’s about serving. It’s about doing for others without regard for recognition or payment. It’s about letting your little shine in the humblest of circumstances.

“Happy” here is the same word Jesus used in the Beatitudes:

*Happy are the poor in spirit, Happy are those who mourn, Happy are the meek,*

*Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, Happy are the merciful, Happy are the pure in heart,*

*Happy are the peacemakers,*

*Happy are those who are persecuted.*

Matthew 5:3-10

Happy are those who let their little light shine.

Preachers and church members are tempted to think, *I will choose this greater place because then I can have greater influence for God*. That sounds spiritual and pious but it’s a trap. Jesus taught:

*When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, “Give this man your seat.” Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, “Friend, move up to a better place.” Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.* Luke 14:8-11

I’m picturing Bob Uecker right now. (Some of you are too young to remember that commercial.) Jesus’ point is that we should let our lights shine right where we are, not worrying about how big or small our light is. If God thinks we need to be somewhere bigger He’ll move us.

I’ll suggest two reasons why we should seek the lower place to serve:

1. First it’s easier to maintain a humble relationship with Jesus from the lower place.

I didn’t say it was easy to serve in the humble place. It’s never easy, but the greater place brings with it the temptation to think we’re here because our light shines so brightly.

We’ve all seen people who got too big too soon. They moved ahead of God – and fell. Their light started to shine on themselves. We have to allow God to determine when our lights should shine in a greater place. If you’re shining your little light God will make clear when He thinks you need to shine somewhere else.

Trust and follow God. He’ll make your light shine exactly as He wants it, and you’ll still be in humble relationship with Jesus.

1. A second reason we should seek the lower place to serve is that if we’re pursuing greater position, we’re not fit for Christian leadership. One of the most important characteristics of a Christian leader is humility.

Did you see our marquee this past week? *He who has learned to obey will know how to command*. The greatest leaders are the greatest servants. Personally I think that’s what ruins politicians: they begin to think about how important they are, how great their leadership is, and they forget that they’re first servants of the people.

It happens in churches. A preacher gathers a large crown of followers and begins to think it’s because he is so important and his leadership is so great. He forgets that he is first a servant of God’s people. I remember once hearing Chuck Swindoll talk of many church leaders who leave bodies of shattered believers in their wake.

We all face the temptation to chase greatness. Not just preachers, and not just those who are gifted with great talent or energy but even those in the lowest positions are tempted to move up. Nobody wants to be the lowest – except Jesus.

You see, the temptation has nothing to do with size. It has to do with spirit. It’s the difference between a spirit of service versus a spirit of self- service. It’s the difference between letting your little light shine where God put you versus shining your little light on yourself.

All this is to say, **God wants to use you**. God wants you to let your little light shine. You don’t have to be somebody great of famous. You have to be willing. He wants you to burn brightly right where you are with whatever He has given you.

It doesn’t matter if you’re a crystal chandelier or a porch light or a night light. What matters is that you light your world.

If we were to black out the windows and doors so that no external light invaded the darkness, one small candle would be enough for us to navigate safely around the sanctuary. Then as we’ve witnessed in our Christmas Eve services, as one candle lights another and another, soon the room is bright enough to read a Bible.

Our church is a shining light for as much as we each let our little light shine. Ask yourself this question: Is your light shining? Don’t compare yourself to anyone else. God has given you something to contribute. Ask, Are you contributing to lighting the world?

Now, let’s get real:

* What specifically are you doing to let your little light shine?
* List three specific ways that your little light is shining.

It’s too easy to actually do nothing and settle for just saying, “*My light shines by how I live*.” That may be true but I don’t think that’s what Jesus has in mind. I think He has in mind something specific we’re doing in ministry.

What specifically are you doing in ministry, in the church or in the community, to shine the light of Christ?

Your light, whether as bright as a halogen spot light or as simple as a night light, is as important as any other.

It’s all of our lights shining together that make our church a bright light in our community.

I’m not a preacher because I have a bright light. I have a bright light because I’m a preacher. The brightness of your light depends only on whether or not you are shining.

*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* Matthew 5:14-16