

Shine!

"You are the light of the world..."

Matthew 5:14

By Rev. Derek Elphick

INTRODUCTION

A steady diet of headline news is enough to discourage anybody.

Daily reports of war, disease, famine, crime, and corruption have a way of distorting our sense of peace and security.

Is there any good in the world or is it as bad as it seems?

It often seems as if evil triumphs over good (history repeating itself).

We wonder, where's the light, the glimmer of hope?

We need the Lord's Word to help us sort "fact" from "fiction"

- separate the appearances of this world from spiritual realities

Only through the lens of Divine revelation can we truly get a sense of what's going on in and around us.

As to whether or not the world is as bad as it seems, that is perhaps an unanswerable question, but the Lord has a proposal.

Rather than feeding the negativity we see around us...

Be the antidote.

Starve evil of oxygen.

Make a difference

How? By letting your light shine through your good works.

Why? Because you are the light of the world and light needs to shine, not be hidden.

This is today's call to action: shine!

CAN WE REALLY SHINE?

Why would the Lord call us to this task?

We don't typically think of ourselves as "carriers of light."

It seems almost presumptuous to think that we can be the "light" in somebody else's life.

What does the Lord teach us about this?

In heaven...

- *"...all truths...shine" (HH 132)*

- *"...when people rub the open Word - the writing itself - on their face or hands or the clothing they have on, their face, hands, or clothing shines" (TC 209).*

- *"...the Word shines when read" (AR 897).*

But what about the people in heaven, the angels? Do they shine?

- *"...those in heaven who love the truths of the Word shine. They shine because Divine truth, wherever it is in heaven, is what gives light" (HH 347)*

Of course, Swedenborg recounts his own experiences of meeting angels or angel couples whose radiance was so dazzling, so incredibly bright, so stunning, he had to turn his gaze!

And the Scriptures are full of examples of people seeing angels in shining garments, full of the *"glory [light] of the Lord...."*

We talk about people "shining" or "beaming" or "glowing" whenever something really happy or wholesome or significant happens to them...

- like getting hired for a "dream job"
- succeeding in accomplishing a really difficult task
- like falling in love
- or getting married
- or witnessing the birth of a child
- or overcoming an obstacle

People "shine" when the truth of a matter is seen clearly

- when things fall into place
- when everything seems right with the world

This is what truth does - it brings "light," brightness into our life

IT'S NOT ABOUT US

To go back to that question: is it presumptuous of us to think that we can be the "light" in somebody else's life?

Fortunately, it's not about us - it's about glorifying God!

*"Let your light so shine before [others], that they may see your good works and **glorify your Father in heaven**" (v. 16).*

When we see the "good works" of another...

- a helping hand
- a listening ear
- how to handle a conflict gracefully & kindly
- resolve a problem
- support and encouragement during a loss

In all these cases,

...what we are witnessing is the face of God
 ...we are seeing the Lord's love and wisdom *reflected* in that person's good works

- **because that is what the Lord's truth does**
- **it shines, brings light to the situation**

And it reminds us of an important reality: the Lord's influence for good is much stronger and far-reaching than first meets the eye.

Travel the world and you will discover this truth quite quickly...

...that there are millions and millions of people who "let their light shine..." through their "good works"

- not for show
- not to be "seen by men"
- not to get something in return

...but because they want to do the right thing.

So letting our light shine is not about us because we are just the "carriers of truth"

- the carriers of the Lord's light
- the truth is the Lord's, not ours

NOTE: as vessels receiving influx of goodness and truth from the Lord...

- we are like "mirrors..." reflecting light...
- *reflecting or projecting* the light/truth that comes from the Lord.

True Christianity no. 508 says,

"...each one of the Lord's truths is a ***mirror in which we see the Lord.***"

Another teaching says,

"...the Divine truths of the Word...***are like mirrors in which the Lord's face is seen***" (AR 938:2).

And like a mirror, when we let our light shine, we are simply reflecting back what is the Lord's in us...

...and in doing that, God is glorified (not us)

A WORD ABOUT "GOOD WORKS"

In our reading from *Matthew 5:14-16* we've been focusing on the Lord's light and how it shines in us, but let's focus a little deeper on the "mechanism" that allows our light to shine - namely "good works."

"Let your light shine...that ***they may see your good works*** and glorify your Father in heaven."

What are "good works" and how are they different from faith and charity?

[The Writings have a LOT to say about this]

Good works are the outward "expression" of faith and charity

And, of course, faith and charity are HUGELY important

- faith is our internal belief system (based on our THOUGHTS)
- charity is our internal response system (based on our LOVES) in which we determine in whom and what we place our energy.

We work hard to cultivate faith and charity...

- want to honor and respect the Lord and the neighbor
- spend a lifetime shunning selfish, material thoughts and desires that get in the way of genuine expressions of faith and charity

Good works are the "third leg of the stool":

- good works are an expression of our whole self - what we think, believe, desire (AC 6073).

- in our lesson today: "charity alone does not produce good works; neither does faith alone produce them. ***But charity and faith together produce good works...***" (TC 373)

Why is that important?

Because...

"...unless the will and understanding ***clothe themselves (or devote themselves) to works or deeds***, they are nothing but a puff of air which passes away..." (DLW 216)

"...good works are nothing but the will and understanding in act" (AC 6405)

"...good works have no life in them" unless charity and faith are infilling them (AC 1873)

"...love in act is what remains..." in us after death (HH 483)

This is a serious spiritual challenge because the hells love nothing more than to keep faith and charity SEPARATE in us...

- but it's "game over" for the hells when we join faith and charity together in good works

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE (WE DO HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY)

Quote: "*Don't worry that your children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you*" (Robert Fulgrum).

This is as true for adults as it is for children - our loved ones, friends, neighbors, workmates are all watching us!

We tend to put a lot of stock in our words...

Why aren't you listening?

Haven't you heard what I said? You want me to say it again?

We tend to think that our friends, loved ones, workmates, remember us for our words, for what we say but that's not the complete picture...

People remember us for what we do (not so much what we say).

[PAUSE] That is why we must get out of our head and into our body...

...that they may see your good works

Our friends, neighbors, loved ones need to see us... (they're watching)

- **championing that which is good, true, noble, and kind**
- **promoting honesty, integrity, trustworthiness**
- **reminding others to relax, be more playful, inquisitive**
- **modeling love & respect**

CONCLUSION

What do I have to offer? I don't have any special skills!

- I'm not like so and so....
- What do I have to show for my life?
- I don't have any light to share...

No matter our age or circumstance, we can all "shine"

Good works are not a complicated thing...

...they are a simple gesture, an expression, of our best selves - what we genuinely desire for others

...they are an outward expression of what we believe to be the charitable, right thing to do

No two people are created the same.

We are all unique vessels which means we reflect the Lord's truth differently.

Our "light" is totally unique, one-of-a-kind

This is why it's really important we share our "good works" with integrity and care because in this way we add more shining beauty to the world.

By hiding our light, we miss an opportunity to add beauty and light to the world.

And so the Lord presents us with a challenge/proposal:

- rather than feeding the negativity
 - change the narrative
 - be the antidote to depressing news
 - starve evil of oxygen by letting your light shine
 - through simple deeds and gestures

Let us as a church community...be that city on a hill

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before [others], that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

AMEN.

Lessons: Exodus 34:29-32; Matthew 5:14-16; TC 209, 373