

Sunday 6th October 2024 - This Little Light Of Mine: Shining Where You Are

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Preacher: Kim Thomas

[0 : 00] Good morning everyone. Good morning. It's just lovely to be able to stand up here and continue the series of Shining Our Light, Our Little Light. Hasn't it been good so far? I don't know if you've heard all of the sermons but honestly it's been really, really good so far and now it's my turn so the bar's set quite high. So I'll see if I can reach that. And we're talking about how in our everyday lives, in whatever we do, wherever we are, how we can shine our light. And just before the service we prayed, as we always do, prayed before the service and it was really, I got a real sense of God wants us to take this light and take it out into the community, into the places where we live, into the places where we are. And that's what we've been talking about, haven't we? We've been talking about Shining Our Light. And I get to talk this week about how we shine our light at work, if you're still at work, or where you volunteer, if you volunteer somewhere, or if you're like me and lucky enough to be retired, wherever you might be. Because I tell you what, I don't know about you, but since I've been retired I've been the busiest person I've ever been in my life. And it's brilliant.

But, you know, it's little things that we do that make such a difference in other people's lives as well as our lives. I mean, my family, my son believes in God. He doesn't go to church, he doesn't do church.

Usually he's working on a Sunday. But, you know, I always say to my grandchildren, God bless when I go. And now they start saying, God bless Grandma. And I went, oh, that's nice. And they went, well, you say that to us.

And I think it's things like that. It's little things that make such a difference. Well, I don't know whether you know, some of you know, but I used to live in Australia.

And I lived there, and I really, really loved my time when I lived in Australia. And actually, on Thursday I'm going back. So don't think, I'm standing up here, I'm preaching, and then you won't see me again. I'm going back to Australia for six weeks, so I won't be back until the end of November. I'm not excited or anything, you know.

[2 : 18] However, one of the best places that I used to go to, I lived up in the hills near Perth. Lived up in the hills, and this is Lake Leshenultia.

And Lake Leshenultia is an amazing place, and I'm going to go back there. And when I'm swimming in Lake Leshenultia, I will think of you all here, freezing cold.

It's an amazing place. There's families, there's sandy beaches. It's a proper, ordinary lake. No crocs, nothing like that. It's a lake, and you can swim in it, and it's just beautiful.

And when I lived in Australia, I actually took a teenager, with all of us from church, took a teenager up to this lake. And you know, Matt was talking about baptisms.

Well, I baptised a teenager in Lake Leshenultia, and it was a profound experience for everybody there. And then I found out afterwards that in the Anglican church in Perth, only bishops baptise adults and young people.

[3 : 25] I always used to work on the premise of, it's better to ask forgiveness than permission. So, yeah, it's a special place. It's just an amazing, amazing place.

But the best time of all to go to Lake Leshenultia is at night. Same lake. What a different view. Isn't that gorgeous? At night time, that's the Milky Way. At night time, you can see so much, so much in the night sky.

And it is fantastic. It's stunning. It's awe-inspiring. And you stand there and you look and you think, oh, my days, look at this, how big it is.

And it makes me feel very small. That's saying something. But it does, it makes me feel so small when I stand in the grandeur and the wonder of all this.

And then I get to understand about the people who write things that we read in the Bible. When you're standing there and you're looking at this immense space with all this light in it, in the darkness.

[4 : 37] And then I get to think, well, I know what David was talking about when he wrote things like this. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

You've set your glory in the heavens. When I consider your heavens the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you've set in place. What is humankind that you're mindful of them?

Human beings that you care for them. You have made them a little lower than the angels. Crown them with glory and honour.

You made them rulers over the works of your hands. You put everything under their feet. All flocks and herds and all animals of the wild. The birds in the sky, the fish in the sea.

All that swim in the paths of the seas. Lord, oh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Now you can see, you can imagine, couldn't you, a view like that that would inspire somebody to write those beautiful words.

[5 : 44] But say, you are majestic and all you have made is incredible. But actually we're part of that. We're part of that creation. We're part of that majesty.

But you know, when you're looking at something like that, it's so easy to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of it all. And feel that we've got no part in God's plan.

We're so small. We're so tiny. Are we so insignificant in all of this? In all of this? But you know what? Yes, we are significant.

Because when you look at the stars in the sky, if they didn't shine, you wouldn't know they were there. You wouldn't see the brightness of the stars in the sky.

The sky's lit up because of the brightness of the stars. And that's us. We're not insignificant. We're part of God's great picture.

[6 : 42] We're part of everything he wants for the world. We're part of that. We're part of that vision. And that beauty. And that glory.

And if our light doesn't shine, that would be a very dark sky. We would live in a very dark world. I mean, the world's dark enough as it is. But my goodness, how much darker would it be without God's people shining their light in the world?

And it's through Jesus that we are able to do that. It's because God has that complete and wonderful fullness in him that he wants to share with us.

It's because Jesus came and gave everything he had so that we can live that life with him and be his light in the world that we're here today.

And it doesn't matter how insignificant we feel. The good news is, is through Jesus, we have that light. We have that light in this place.

[7 : 47] So we are part of God's incredible creation. And he loves us so much. Nobody, but nobody is beyond the sphere of God's love.

Nobody. Nobody. Now you might think, yeah, I know that. And I hope you do. And that is absolutely wonderful. That is incredible. But there are many more people out there who don't know this.

They don't know this love. They don't know this care. They don't know the promise of, it doesn't matter how big a screw up you are. It's okay. Because you're mine.

And you're here with me. And I love you. And I love you like this. You can just rest in me. I didn't know this.

I didn't know this until I was an adult. I grew up knowing that God was good. And, you know, he'd look after us. But that was as far as it went. I believed in God.

[8 : 51] Because my mum and dad believed in God. So that was it. That was as far as it went. There was nothing about personal relationship or anything like that. But there was always something within me.

And I didn't know what it was. I thought it was because I was just such a good person. And when, you remember Dave was saying last week about when the kids got asked what they wanted to, you know, what do you want to do when you grow up?

And that's what we, we always ask people. I ask my grandchildren that. What do you want to be when you grow up? For goodness sake. I mean, one's 22. So she's more or less got an idea. But the other two are like 9 and 11.

One wants to be a dinosaur still, you know. He's decided he might be a paleontologist now though. He is growing up a bit. But I always, always knew what I wanted to do.

What do you want to do when you grow up, Kim? I want to be a police officer. Oh, do you? Yeah, I want to be a police officer. And it was when I joined the police force a very, very long time ago. Before some of you were born actually.

[9 : 51] I went down to Kent and I joined the police force. And I became a police officer. And I was in the police force for 13 years until I had an injury. And I had to come out.

But when I became a police officer, I wasn't a Christian. I was a good person. I wanted to make the world a better place. But I wasn't a Christian. Then some things happened in my life.

And then I was standing at a notice board at work. And I saw a poster. Now, here's a scenario.

It's a playbook.

Hey. Hey. Hi, Jim.

[11 : 10] Tree gift. Sharing your faith doesn't have to be hard. Let's do it together.

It wasn't like that. The poster was actually there on the notice board. And I was reading it, and it was saying about a Billy Graham mission. And I thought, hmm, that's interesting. And then a lady called Jennifer came up and stood beside me.

And she said, oh, see, you're looking at the poster. And I went, yeah. She said, yeah, I'll put that up there. And I said, oh, right, okay. She said, are you interested? I said, hmm, I might be. And she said, I'm going.

It's going to be good. Why don't you come? And I've said before, because I say again things that are good, I use this a lot. I'm going.

It's going to be good. Why don't you come? Would you like to come? So I did. And I said, yes. And that's when I became a Christian.

[12 : 15] After I'd been to a Billy Graham mission, and I heard Billy Graham say, there is nothing in your life you've done that you can't be forgiven for. Then I thought, I need to explore this.

And from then on, you know, it's taken a long, long, long, long time. But I'm still on that journey. Like Dave was saying last week about a journey, still on a journey.

But it started with, I'm going. It's going to be good. Would you like to come? By an invitation from somebody at work, it just said, come on. Come with me. And this was the difference it made to me.

I love this hymn. And can it be? My chains fell off. My heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed thee. And from that very moment that I heard that simplest gospel message from Billy Graham, with Jennifer by the side of me, when I heard that simple message, is there's nothing in your life that you've done that you can't be forgiven for.

I heard that message, and the chains fell off. The chains just fell off. The guilt fell off. And my heart was free.

[13 : 30] It was like a bird had been set free inside me. And of course, it was the bird. It was the bird of the Holy Spirit. You know, it was the Holy Spirit. He was moving within me.

And so I rose, and I went forth, and I committed my life to Jesus. All those wasted years beforehand, and I thought, why didn't somebody tell me all of this?

Why has it taken this long to know about this? Why is it a big secret? And I was kind of cross at the time, because I thought, I needed to know this before now.

But, of course, we probably know, none of you will be like this. But as I journeyed along my Christian path, I met a few Christians who scared me to death.

They were so intense. They were so intense, you know. They were the people who come up to you and go, are you saved? And honestly, there's nothing wrong with that.

[14 : 35] But it just frightened me. It frightened me to death. And if you said something awful like, I think so. Well, what do you mean you think so? Either you know or you don't know. And there are some Christians who, even today, still scare me to death, because they're so intense.

And I just think, oh, well, thank God that they love the Lord that much. But I wonder how many people actually bring somebody to the Lord in that way.

Maybe they do. You know, I'm not disrespecting the people who do that. But this is the sort of people that I think about when I think about these intense people.

I'll give it a minute so you can see the whole picture. Not enough laughing for somebody to see Jesus behind the curtains.

There you go. Have you found Jesus? And there he is behind the curtains. But I thought, well, is this the way that people tell other people about Jesus?

[15 : 43] You know, do they go and knock on doors? Is that how you have to do it? I can't do that. I just can't do that. I can't go and knock on doors. So I kind of started being a bit relational about my faith.

I wasn't ashamed of my faith. And I started thinking, well, okay, how can I just be a Christian in everyday life? And that's just what I was.

It's just a Christian in everyday life. So when somebody said to me, oh, what are you doing this weekend? And I'd say, well, I'm going to church on Sunday. And I still do that now. What are you doing this weekend? Oh, I'm in church on Sunday.

Oh, yeah, of course you are, aren't you? You know. And then sometimes there'll be a question about, well, what's it like then? Oh, you want to come to the church I go to? It's fantastic. Oh, well, I'm not religious. No, neither am I.

You know. And I'm not religious. You know, I don't think this is an overly religious church. We have a deep, strong, wonderful faith. But we don't think that just because we trip over our cassock, you know, that long black frock that Matt had to wear the other day, just because we trip over that doesn't mean to say that's it, the Holy Spirit's going to leave, you know.

[16 : 53] And some places you can feel this is so religious, I don't fit in here. And I think that's what people are talking about when they say I'm not religious. But I say, well, I have a really deep faith.

I have a deep faith and I go to a wonderful church where everybody's welcome. And that is a wonderful thing to be able to say, isn't it? Isn't that great to say I go to a wonderful church where everybody is welcome?

Everybody. And if you are deeply, deeply religious and you really, really think that it's important how you do things, you're still welcome here. That's the wonderful thing about it is there's no judgment.

And that's what Jesus wants. And I think the conversations that you have, wherever you are, whether it's in church, whether it's at home, whether it's at work, whether it's where you volunteer, whether it's wherever you are, when you're talking to your children, your grandchildren, anybody, friends of your children and your grandchildren, just be the people that God's called you to be.

But don't be ashamed of the fact that you go to church on a Sunday, you know. Don't be ashamed of that. Or, oh, I do this. Our church does this. We do a lot of community stuff in our church.

[18 : 07] Why don't you come along to some of that? Do you like curry? Why not come to the curry club? You know, if you can get upstairs. Tom's looking out for the curry club on Sunday.

You know, why don't you come? Come to the pub club. Come to this. Come to that. Invite people. I'm going. It's going to be good. Why don't you come with me? You know, they might not be Christians. Christians.

Yet. But actually what we want to do is show them the love of God that is for everyone. And Jesus thought that was really important. He thought it was so important to tell everybody just how important everybody was.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, this man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

Then Jesus told them this parable. Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?

[19 : 22] And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me.

I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

I can use the one. Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp?

Sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it. And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me.

I have found my lost coin. In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

[20 : 35] I think when I said I want to follow Jesus for all of my life, all the angels of heaven rejoiced along with God and all the saints.

And I think with all of us, when we make that decision to follow Jesus, heaven rejoices because we are like the lost ones who are found and we're important.

And like Jesus says, one, one coin, one sheep, all the others get left behind just so we can go and find that one. In your circle of friends and family and people you meet, somebody you talk to in the supermarket, there's that one.

And wouldn't it be great if you were the one who was instrumental in that person thinking, oh, that sounds interesting.

I might find out more about that. Or you put a word in the right place when they're in such a low place. They need somebody to talk to and you might be that one person.

[21 : 37] You might be that somebody that somebody needs today, tomorrow, through the rest of the week. You are that person. You are. You are that person that somebody needs.

You just have to be open to listen to the spirit and what the spirit says. And not put barriers like Jesus was saying, you know, the sinners were there and Jesus ate with them and he was with them.

So Jesus saw that it was important. It was important. It was important. And we, we are all part of that plan. And wouldn't that be wonderful if somebody said, well, why didn't I know this before like I did?

But then remembered the person who actually brought me to the Billy Graham concert. And it was the conference. And it was just that one thing at the notice board that changed my life forever.

And it was that one little tiny thing. She just had the courage to put that notice up on the notice board. Now, as my life went on, as you know, there's me and my little mum.

[22 : 44] She's not with us anymore. You just love her. She was so gorgeous. I felt a call to ordination. And I thought that might get in the way of people knowing about Jesus.

It's funny, isn't it? I did think, I thought with all that gear on, that might get in the way of people knowing about Jesus. But God knows his stuff. And he knows who he calls.

And he knows what he calls us to. And actually, the wearing of the dog collar, not so much the stuff, but the wearing of the dog collar does open doors sometimes.

And I'm, I've taken over from Ruth as the chaplain at the Pathway Project. Thanks to Kathy inviting me to do that. And I wear my dog collar when I go because they know who I am then.

And to start with, the ladies, they're like, oh, well, we didn't know whether we wanted to talk to you. Because, like, you know, you're religious, aren't you? Hence the conversation. But actually, they can identify who I am.

[23 : 41] And it was Ruth that suggested this, our old curate, for those of you who don't know Ruth. And she suggested, wear your dog collar because people know who you are. So I did. And it does open up conversations because they know they're in a safe place.

But you don't have to wear a dog collar to talk about Jesus. You know, if people know you're a Christian, they might want you to talk about Jesus. Because it would be, if you don't, it would be a bit like you're going into a butcher's shop.

And the butcher said, do you ever think about becoming a vegetarian? You know? Because you're Christians. They expect you to talk about God. You know? And so I did.

I talked about God in a school I was in. In Australia, I was a school chaplain. But I was a parish priest to start with. And then I got headhunted to this school.

And that's only a few of the kids at the school. But also, I used to go to an island called Rottnest. And Rottnest had a little chapel on there. And one of the wonderful things you could do, great holiday island.

[24 : 42] One of the things you could do was you could go and you could stay on the island, which was very expensive to stay on for a week, if you took the service in the chapel. And all sorts of people used to come to the service in the chapel.

And it was great. It was a great way of engaging with other people wherever I was. And then the other thing that I did was I got on my motorbike and I rode around and I talked to people about Jesus when they asked me, you know.

Or I was just there. And like that first picture, that's me in Australia. Somebody took a photo of me going, oh, you're a vicar on a bike. But it got in the paper, the vicar on the bike.

And people talked to me about, first of all, about bikes. And then about me being a vicar. And then about Jesus. But it takes a while. But you don't have to wear a dog collar or ride a bike to talk about Jesus.

Like I say, if people know you're a Christian, they might want to know some things. They might want to ask you some questions. So shine your light wherever you are. And I promise you, I'm coming to the end now.

[25 : 54] Shine your light wherever you are. Do you know, bring God's light into the world. Because that's what we're here for. To bring God's light into the world. And think about that night sky. If those little lights weren't shining, it would be a really dull sky.

It wouldn't be a wow thing, would it? You're those lights that shine. And even yesterday, I got to shine. Because that's ride to the wall.

And this is my son and my granddaughter. The first bike with the poppy on it. And the white Kawasaki behind, with the little gnome on it, is me. Somebody took a photo of us.

And I put the other one in, for those of you who like wartime things, because that's a Lancaster bomber coming in over the Arboretum. It was fantastic. And the Lancaster bomber came in after the service and flew over the wall.

It was wonderful. And that wall has got 16,000, I think it was, names on it, of those who have fallen. And there's still room for more. And so we go to remember and give thanks for the people who gave their lives with Rides the Wall.

[27 : 03] And there were at least 10,000 bikes there yesterday. It was huge. Yeah, it was huge. And it's getting bigger every year. And I've done it for many years now. But even while we were there and there was a little brief service, and I was the only one standing in that crowd who said the Lord's Prayer out loud.

But I said it out loud. Actually, I was the only one who sang the national anthem in the bit that I was in. But I still sang it. Because I was there and I had the opportunity.

And I thought, I am going to say the Lord's Prayer over this place. Because that's part of letting our light shine. And, you know, silence all around me. But I said the Lord's Prayer out loud. And then I heard a few mumbles a bit further back.

And then, finally, that's the group of us. That's my granddaughter, my son, obviously me. My son's sister-in-law and her boyfriend. And out of that group, there are actually, I said to Matt, there's only one Christian there.

But there's two because my granddaughter is a Christian. And two of them don't have any belief whatsoever. And one of them does have, like I say, my son has a strong belief in God but doesn't go to church.

[28 : 19] But my granddaughter, thankfully, is a Christian. But do you know what? It doesn't matter, does it? Because it's us and being the light that God made us to shine in the world.

So let your little light shine wherever you are. If you're at work, I know it's hard. But don't, you know, somebody says, what did you do on Sunday? I went to church.

Think about how God wants you to share who you are and what you are with the people around us. Because you might be that person that they need right at that minute.

Amen.