

“Shining”

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First United Methodist Church of Wausau
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Psalm 139

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it altogether.
You pursue me behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.

Whither shall I go from your spirit? Or whither shall I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there! if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, “Let only darkness cover me, and the light around me be night,”
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you, for you are fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are your works;
You know me very well.

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,
intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.

In your book were written the days that were formed for me,
every day, before they came into being.

How profound to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

If I would count them, they are more than the sand;

When I awake, I am still with you.

O that you would slay the wicked, O God,

and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me, those who maliciously defy you,
who lift themselves up against you for evil.

Do I not hate them that hate you, O LORD?

And do I not loathe them that rise up against you?

I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts.

And see if there be any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting!

Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

My parents took me to see *Mary Poppins* at the drive-in when I was young. I loved it. In the years that followed, I learned the music by heart listening to the LP over and over. I'd tried with limited success to imitate Julie Andrews (who had a 3-octave range as an early teenager!) This was well before home theaters so I didn't see the movie again until it was rereleased years later when I could drive my younger sister and two cousins to the local drive-in to experience the magic with me. I was surprised at how much I retained from that first viewing.

Do you recall – early in the movie – as Jane and Michael watch their new nanny unpacking? The astonishing things that she drew from that carpetbag! One small item appeared quite ordinary at first glance. A tape measure. With it, Mary Poppins measured each child to some giggling and a demand that they get to measure her. “Very well.” They drew the tape up to her height, then, looking at the tape, she read, “Mary Poppins, Practically Perfect in Every Way.”

For the first half of my life I lived as if that's what I wanted. Not to be Mary Poppins. But practically perfect. Imagine, no Cs or Ds because I would have studied and understood the material. No rudenesses to apologize for. No bad investments – of money, or in dead end relationships. No shame. No embarrassment.

This is only my list I'm talking about. Your list is different but you know what practically perfect would mean in your life. Of course, we're not perfect. Not even close.

Confession time. Some things you may or may not know about me. I always wanted to be perfect but I'm also judgmental. I believe I know the best way to do things. I'm a first child and I tend to be bossy. I love music, but I've never been more than a technician. I could never draw feeling out of a piano the way some people can. I can't function in clutter yet I have trouble staying on top of it.

Let's see, I'm white, straight and sis gender. Divorced. The only language I speak is English which makes it hard to connect with so very many people. I'm extremely hard on myself – and others, if I'm not careful. I was always the last picked in gym class because I was so uncoordinated. I have nothing in common with jocks, yet I married one. I love food and until I had to change my eating regimen, I'd have never been successful at dieting. Yet until recently I had little compassion for people who struggle with their weight. This is confession remember. I'm consumed with what other people think of me. My family tree is full of mental illness. Oh, and I've recently discovered that I have Asperger's which at long last explained why I can't read people, why I'm so blunt and standoffish. (Trust me, this public speaking is a God-thing.)

Why do I share all this? Just as I'm a complex, hodgepodge of stuff, so are you. We're each good at some things, not all of which are deemed valuable. And we're really bad at others.

And you know what? That's okay! God is okay with me being a bit of a mess and with you being a bit of a mess as well. God is still committed to doing a good work in all of us, but while God is doing a good work in each of us, God has work for us. Did you get that? God who began a good work in you – remember the song? – will be faithful to complete it. And as God is doing that work, God has things for you to be doing.

The lovely thing in of all this is that while God expects me to be doing my good thing for God and you to be doing yours, God does not expect me to be a plumber or a nurse or you to be an electrician or a rocket scientist – unless that's you. God expects us to use who we are and what we have been given – our native talents, our skills and trainings, those Spirit gifts of which we all

receive something. God expects us to use all our best and our worst for the benefit of God's good creation.

I'm to use my patience and my impatience, my unique ways of seeing and thinking and being. So are you. This is part of what Jesus means when he says to let your light shine. Don't hide it. Put it out there. Your light is unlike any other. There is nobody else on this planet quite like you. Or you. Or her. Or him. Or them.

God know that this planet needs all of our gifts – your kindness, your generosity, your ability to work a room, your grace, my forgetfulness, your passion, your frustration with how slowly people move or grow or change. God expects us to use all of this *as our light*.

When we dedicate our time or our tasks to God, we are doing God's good thing. If you love to play board games and you choose to play with a homebound neighbor or with some folks at the nursing home, you are letting your light shine.

A retired man was having trouble finding his niche in the church. I'll call him Roland. Roland's wife heard that the church's food pantry was looking for someone to pray over the canned goods as they stocked the shelves. Wanting to help her husband, and also wanting to get him out from underfoot, she suggested Roland look into it. He did. And Roland found his ministry. From then on, Roland prayed in the empty food pantry regularly. Word got around, and people wanted to be like Roland. Others began to step up to help, but they only wanted to work if Roland was there too, so profound was his passion for the ministry he was doing.

We have a Personal Needs Closet in our building. We need caring people who can meet with the folks who come to the toilet paper church, people who will help these neighbors collect supplies while also treating them with respect and compassion. We need someone who might find their niche, like Roland, in stocking the shelves of that space. Could this be you?

It's easy to discount the gifts we don't understand, or the ones that society doesn't value. Few may appreciate a person's inability to pretend interest in a subject that doesn't connect with him. Yet when you want someone who can focus their entire being on a project, he's the one you want. A woman who walks away with the car door open and the engine running may be dismissed as a flake. But she may be just the one whose ingenuity develops a means to remove impoverished people to safety from the floodwaters. They may be written off as second-class people because they don't have jobs, or education, or connections, or citizenship. Yet each one is as beloved of God as you and I are. God needs all of us to do our part, each contributing our uniquenesses for the benefit and wellbeing of us all.

Let your light shine. God gives you this light, for this exact purpose. Shine your light in your home and in your workplace, at play and at worship. This is your ministry. This is God's assignment for you.

Interestingly, as we shine, as we grow in our capacity to reveal and share all of who we are and all of what we have been given, we come to practice better stewardship.

Stewardship gets a bad rap when it's used only to talk about money for the church. But stewardship is exactly about how you use everything you are and everything you have for God's good intention – your money, yes, but also your time, your sense of humor, your compassion, your facility with numbers, music or lumber, and a host of other things. We'll talk more about this another time. For now, let God's light in you shine on. Don't put it under a jar or a basket. Lift it high so that the world can see a little clearer by it.

Amen.