

“Shimmering”

1 Peter 2:11–17; 1 Corinthians 14:20-33

Is the light of Christ in you so bright that you shimmer?

“Live such good lives among the pagans that . . . they may see your good deeds and glorify God when he comes . . .,” Peter writes, as he urges the persecuted believers to remember that their entire lives are to be glorious, shimmering witnesses to God’s goodness and grace. Sure, Peter knows that these believers, the “exiles,”

were being slandered and shunned, but he called them to live good, honorable, virtuous lives, even if it meant that the pagans would realize that the Christians had lived the right sort of lives only when Christ returns. What a powerful and realistic perspective. Think about it for a moment. Peter wants the believers to lead others toward glorifying God, not in their present lives, but so the pagans will see the truth when Christ returns and, thus, I presume, find salvation. David Bartlett writes:

While there is a kind of missionary appeal here, the hope that the Gentiles will be impressed by the honorable behavior of the Christians, hope is still eschatological hope. There is no easy assumption that faithful behavior will win admiration in this world; rather, at history’s end, when God comes to visit, the outsiders will behold the good deeds of the faithful. Then, at last, at *the* last, they will glorify God. This is the judgment toward which the epistle already pointed in 1:17, reminding the readers that God is both Father and impartial judge.

It is God whom the Gentiles will glorify, however, not the Christians themselves. The verse keeps the same balance as that of the Sermon on the Mount: “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:16 NRSV). The good deeds of believers do not redound to the glory of believers; they redound to the glory of God.

Psychologically as well as theologically it is striking that the epistle here at least resists the temptation to assume that the day of visitation will mean wrath and destruction for those who have acted destructively and wrathfully against Christians. Instead, the hope is that those who have not understood the good conduct of the faithful in the everyday world will at the final transformation also be transformed—from unbelief to faith (contrast Revelation 18).¹

Read again the last paragraph above. What is God’s hope? That all would turn to him, for he loved the world so much he gave his Son (John 3:16). So of course, even if it is only at the end that the pagans turn to him, that is far better than never. I had never paid enough attention to this bit from Peter – but it deserves some serious reflection.

But what are “good lives?”

In the succeeding paragraphs of 1 Peter, the apostle puts shape around the call to live a good life (“honorable” in the NRSV). Not surprisingly, Peter’s tune is from the same sheet music as Paul, who had much to say to the early Christians about the lives they were to lead in Christ. A good way to understand Paul’s advice and instruction is to read it through a lens that has four parts:

1. Do what builds up the body of Christ.
2. Do what is a good witness to Jesus.
3. Avoid what tears down the body of Christ.
4. Avoid what is a bad witness to Jesus.

I came across this simple interpretation aid years ago (though I cannot remember where!). It has stood the test of time. Why does Paul want all public speaking in tongues to be interpreted (see 1 Corinthians 14)? Here is why. How can the practice build up the body (the church) if no one besides the tongues speaker knows what is



¹ Bartlett L. David, *New Interpreter’s Bible*, 1994–2004, 12, 274.

being said? Similarly, why does Paul want to the believers to be orderly and controlled when they gather to worship (also 1 Corinthians 14)? Because the chaos will make the believers look crazy to outsiders. How could that be a good witness to our Lord? To follow Peter, how could the pagans be expected to think well of the Christians if they seemed crazy and worse?

Clearly, Paul also emphasizes our part in building thriving Christian communities, for then, and only then, can we truly carry out Jesus' mandate to offer Christ to the world, to feed the hungry, and to house the poor. Either we do this together, Paul would say, or we are not going to do it at all.

Perhaps "witness" means to you sitting down with someone to tell them about Jesus. Perhaps it is knocking on a few doors. Or being a bit kinder to the slow grocery clerk.

In truth, all this and more is encompassed by the simple word "witnessing." It is everything that we say and do in relationship with others, even if our "relationship" is nothing more than a fleeting encounter. There is no moment when we are not to be a shimmering disciple of Christ.

We must always be aware of how we seem to others. That does not mean that we will always do or say what pleases everyone. That does not mean we will back off from proclaiming the Good News. But it does mean that we must always constantly strive to be Christ-like with all people. We must surprise them with our kindness, our compassion, our understanding, our joy, and our contentment. Surely, in our increasingly angry world, Christ's offer of genuine peace would be gratefully received.

In 1 Peter 3, the apostle quotes Psalm 134, as he calls the believers to "seek peace and pursue it" (1 Peter 3:11).

The peace we seek will not come by accident; we will not stumble onto it or discover it thrust upon us. Rather, Peter reminds us that the pursuit of peace takes seriousness and discipline. Indeed, Peter calls the Christians to disciplined lives three times in this short letter (1:13; 4:7; 5:8). Now, this is not about leading stern, joyless lives. But it is about seriousness of purpose and the application of our time, talents, gifts, and services to the work of God's kingdom.

Grabbing an occasional bit of Bible reading when we have a spare moment or two will not get us where we want to go. The same goes for haphazard prayers and for worshipping when it is convenient. And it is just as true when it comes to our money. Giving out of our leftovers is never going to help us to grow in our faith or to find the peace we seek. Rather, growing to maturity in our Christian life takes disciplined prayer, regular Bible reading, rain-or-shine worshipping, loving service, sacrificial giving, and so on.

Good stewards, serving one another

In 4:10, Peter urges the Christians to be good stewards of God's grace, serving each other with whatever gifts God has given them, understanding that their ability to serve at all comes from God's strength, not their own.

Our life at First UMC is to be just this – mutually encouraging, serving, and caring. We are to represent the life of God to each other. Pheme Perkins writes, "Passages like this one remind Christians today that faith requires community. Believers should be active members of local churches that are gathered for prayer, for mutual support, for celebration. They are also reminded that local churches should be places in which all members of the church share the particular gifts that God has given them."²

First UMC is just such a church. God has blessed us with many gifts, and we return those gifts to God, using them to serve not only each other, but neighbors and strangers all over the world. But sometimes we need to be reminded that because we work from God's strength, not our own, serving one another becomes an act of worship, the path to peace., and the means by which we become a shimmering disciple of our Lord.

Daily Bible Readings - Read 1 Peter in its entirety each week, followed by a Psalm on Saturday.

Monday	1 Peter 1	A living hope
Tuesday	1 Peter 2	A chosen people, called to serve
Wednesday	1 Peter 3	Living as exiles, part 1
Thursday	1 Peter 4	Living as exiles, part 2
Friday	1 Peter 5	Tending God's flock
Saturday	Psalm 34	Praise for deliverance from trouble

² From her commentary on 1 & 2 Peter, James, and Jude in the *Interpretation series*.