

Reflections of the Spirit**“Let It Shine, Let It Shine, Let It Shine”**

“I grew tired of being scolded every Sunday morning, so I quit the church.” That, in a nutshell, is a story I heard at the ECCT convention about a young woman, a “millennial,” who left one of our sister churches in Connecticut. I have to confess that for years, decades even, I felt similar “vibes.” In the Gospels Jesus speaks on occasion of the need to be reborn: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Seizing on words like that, preachers over the years chided me for my short-



comings, and urged me to become a new person, a different person, a better person. Ever since I was a child, I heard that I needed to find more faith, pray harder, give up my worldly ways. Traditional Christians of course may have taken those same words as words of exhortation and encouragement. But what I felt, like that young woman, was futility. . . and criticism. I may control what I say, what I do but I don't control the depth of my faith. All of us have heard stories of radical conversion — people having visions, or intensely religious experiences of revelation that change them. Those are unasked for, unanticipated events that just happen. But many of us plod along in our spiritual lives, thinking, praying about God and our inner lives but never experiencing radical rebirth. In fact, more likely, our attitudes toward right and wrong, our convictions about the meaning of our lives have evolved shaped by experience, observation and, heaven forbid, logic. God and faith are ingredients but not the only ones.

Recently though, I had a revelation, an insight that Jesus may have meant something quite different when he said we need to be reborn. In this view Jesus is calling us not to become someone different but rather *the person we truly are*. Jesus sees God, love, goodness in all people. With his teaching he is calling each of us to reach down deep inside and bring it out, and be the person we were born to be. How often, for example, have I spoken in anger and then said to myself, “That’s not me, that’s not the person I want to be. Why did I say that?” From this perspective the frustration I felt over the years when preachers called on me to become a different person disappears. Now I hear words calling me not to be someone else, not someone new, but to be the person hidden inside yearning to come forth.



Most important, here at St. Andrew's I feel supported in this spiritual journey to birth the person I want to be. At St. Andrew's from the pulpit, in prayer and in conversation during coffee hour I hear messages of openness and support—never scolding or criticism. Thinking back to that young woman who left her church, would that I could invite her to come visit with us some Sunday!

This way of understanding brings to mind the hymn *This Little Light of Mine*. Remember how the words go: “This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.” I only wish it were not so often considered music sung by, for and about kids. There is a glow in each of us—may it burst forth and bring light and love to the world.

*John Armstrong*