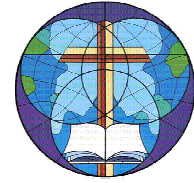


New Life in the Window¹

✠ **God shines on us.** (vv.1,7,8)

✠ **We shine for God.** (vv.6,7)



In the name of Jesus, the Savior of all, dear members of God's family:

One of the interesting insights from the School of Outreach this Spring, was that some of our most dedicated members did not know we have a Mission Statement. It's been posted on our website from the beginning. And even though some may not have read it, everyone who has worshiped at New Life since October, 1992, has seen our Mission Statement shining above the altar. It illustrates why German Lutherans called divine worship *Gottesdienst* – “God’s service.” Consider **New Life in the Window** as we explore who is serving whom in *Gottesdienst*. Is God serving us, or are we serving God? First...

✠ **God shines on us.** (vv.1,7,8)

Our single stained glass window was designed and donated by Steve Williams. His early life told why we need God to serve us first. Steve would be glad I'm telling you his story. When I first rang his doorbell in the Spring of 1987, Steve had little use for organized religion. Living with his girlfriend, he had turned his back on his Roman Catholic upbringing and was estranged from his father. Since Steve was Sales Manager for Buerkle Buick it seemed good to take my Buick for service. Always friendly, Steve never told me to stop coming. As with all our prospects, we were determined to keep him on our mailing list until he joined our church, joined someone else's church, died or Judgment Day would come.

Steve came to church at Snail Lake School a few times with his girlfriend and her niece Lisa, engaged to Dennis, grandson of Clarence and Ann Bocklund. Steve's doorbell led to serving all their spiritual needs. But it took a medical miracle for Steve to come around. In January of 1992, he called in a whisper with inoperable lung cancer. Only nine months to live – God definitely had Steve's attention to be instructed and confirmed. Spring 1992, body failing, Steve attended Midweek Lenten services in a bright purple athletic suit. God was serving Steve with the light of law and gospel, sin and grace.

Late August, 1992, Steve asked to design and donate a round window above our altar. He assured me it would clearly portray the mission he had come to love in God's light. Twenty plus revisions finally captured our butterfly logo of New Life with the face of a man and woman at the bottom, heads joined at the cross, meditating on God's Word. The Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – **shines** in three interlocking circles. The colors of the cross show how **God shines on us** with his blessings on this earth (brown), through the blood of Christ (red), and makes us rich (gold) with God's grace in Christ.

Steve would not have come to God except that God sent His servant to Steve. God got all this started in the previous chapter of Isaiah with sweet invitations: *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost....Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”* (Isaiah 55:1,6f NIV) After **God shines on us**, This is what the LORD says: *“Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed.... these [foreigners] I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer....The Sovereign LORD declares— he who gathers the exiles of Israel: “I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.”*

¹ The round window above the altar at New Life is our Mission Statement. Designed and donated by Steve Williams, it was installed on the day he was called home to heaven. Follow the links at the bottom of page 2, to hear his story in this sermon.

Like all of us guilty sinners, Steve was running away from God. None of us would come on our own if our parents or other Christians did not seek us out in the LORD's Name. We would keep living in the darkness of our own selfish unbelief if not for His unfathomable mercy that **God shines on us**. Sadly, we take this grace for granted when we're too sick to worship, but not to go out to dinner somewhere else. Only because of God's grace in Christ could Steve or any of us finally be able to say...

✠ **We shine for God.** (vv.6,7)

Just as our round window shines in the most prominent place above the altar, so God planted His chosen people of Israel on the narrow strip of Canaan between the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Desert. All the world's commerce from Rome and Greece, Babylon, China and India, had to pass through that little land of Israel on the way to Egypt and Africa. Traders love to tell stories. And caravans could tell of the Creator God whose people were different from everyone else. Their religion excluded anyone who was not physically a Jew by birth or circumcision. But already in Isaiah (700 B.C.) the LORD God of Israel was telling of the Messiah who would come through the womb of a Jewish virgin as the Son of God to be the Savior of the world. All of us non-Jews would be included in the same faith that saved ancient believers, the Good News of sins-forgiven makes us **shine for God**.

Can you hear the progression of intensity in worship as **We shine for God**? *“And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep [guard] the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”*

Look at the base of the butterfly. Isn't it beautiful how we as men and women **shine for God** as long as our heads are joined at the cross, meditating on God's Word? We enjoy a deep love between brothers and sister in Christ at New Life. I hear it in meetings where the men keep asking how we can better serve our sisters in God's family. I see it in the support our women give to this Gospel ministry. Such love was clear in the woman who cared for Steve Williams in his final months. Sue Norton sat with him in worship and grieved his loss. Not long ago my wife reconnected with Sue as a receptionist who told how she attends a Bible-believing church and reaches out with the Gospel to her family and friends. For Jesus' sake, God accepts us in His *“house of prayer for all nations.”*

As **We shine for God**, He also accepts our offerings. This may not seem so important unless you study other cultures and religions. The Mayans in Central America had ancient legends of a Savior from heaven, a clouded Gospel, which devolved into violence over time. Without the clear message of Christ-crucified guilt increased until they offered human sacrifice. Only the death and resurrection of God's own Son, the Savior of Jews and Gentiles, can cleanse our guilty conscience to **shine for God** with gifts.

Steve Williams was shining for God in his final months when he reconciled with his father. A recent newspaper story related how they were buried side-by-side, freeing up an extra gravesite which was donated for the poor. A nearly destitute woman begged God for help to bury her young son. He was laid to rest where a Williams would have been except God shined on Steve.

Gottesdienst means **God shines on us** so that **We shine for God**. Outside, Steve's window is hard to see in daylight. But the darker the night, the brighter the light appears. Passersby can see the two hemispheres Steve designed in the top two circles of the Trinity. Steve spent his last days on this earth shining God's love to taxi cab drivers and everyone he met on his bike trip West that summer. But none of us realized New Life would eventually shine through this window to the world. On New Life letterhead, business and post cards **We shine for God**. His work shines on the Internet from America to China where pastors call ours the “window to heaven” website. May we never take New Life for granted as if eating out is better than eating here the Good News of sins-forgiven. **God shines on us...We shine for God – New Life in the Window.** Amen.