

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, April 5, 2009
Rev. John Tapscott

"CHRISTIANS A.G.L.O.W" - for Confirmation

Philippians 2:14-16

My text is from Paul's letter to the Philippians 2:14-16 - "Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life."

Over the past month I have working with the candidates for confirmation. I am happy to report that they did all things without grumbling or questioning (well most things). Parents, ask me for the secret afterwards. But it's a great Sunday when we bring young people into membership through confirmation. Parents and family and Sunday School teachers all deserve credit. You should be proud of these young people as they come forward to profess their allegiance to Christ and his church. In today's world, it can be truly said that people who follow Jesus "shine as lights in the world."

My title comes from this phrase of Paul's from Philippians 2:15. This is a word to our confirmands and to all Christians. "You shine as lights in the world." You are Christians "A.G.L.O.W." Now I don't mean that Christians are lit up like Christmas trees. But each letter of the word "AGLOW" stands for a vital part of the Christian life. I hope that these aspects of the Christian life will take hold and be fulfilled in our confirmands and in the rest of us, too.

First, the letter "A." We're going to let that stand for the word "ACCEPT" - accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and Lord.

God loves you, you are important to Him, and he cares about you. God sent Jesus Christ into the world to live for you, to die on the Cross for your sins, to rise again, and to take you home at the last. So acknowledge and accept God's gift of his Son for your salvation. This is what really allows you to call yourself a Christian and it's how you know you're a Christian - by receiving Jesus Christ into your life. Say "Yes" to Jesus and in God's sight you will be blameless and innocent. At the instant of acceptance, you become a child of God, not just for this life, but forever. John tells us in his Gospel, "To all who received him, who

believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." The first letter of "aglow" is "a" and it stands for "accept". Accept Jesus Christ into your heart you will shine as a light in the world, with God's Holy Spirit dwelling within you.

The second letter of "AGLOW" is "g", and that stands for "GROW."

Confirmation is not a finish, but a start. Through your life in the church you have already grown in the way of Jesus and from now on you will continue that process even more earnestly. The Bible tells us that Jesus "grew in wisdom, in stature, in favour with God and man." And with the help of the Holy Spirit and the church, so will you. With God's help you will grow in the fruits of the Holy Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control, faithfulness. You will become more like Jesus. By God's grace this process will continue all of your earthly days. Don't quench the Spirit, but cooperate with God in the work He is doing in your life. You shine as lights in the world. You are Christians "aglow."

The third letter of "aglow" is "L". I suggest that stands for "LEARN."

This is an area where many Christians fall down a bit. They stop learning and digging into the faith and its riches. They become satisfied with a superficial sort of Christianity, which leaves them open to lots of misguided teachings. They are blown this way and that by the foul winds of a crooked and perverse generation. So in your Christian life, you must continue to learn.

Now there are many Christian books and DVD's that are good and helpful, but the best source for your learning is always the Holy Bible. The Bible is God's inspired word which not only outlines God's plan of salvation, but also gives you God's instructions for living and guides you in God's way. The Bible will challenge, comfort and inspire you. The Bible will help you to know God and his plan for your life. That's why we give confirmands a good study Bible full of explanations and applications. It is a Bible which they can use for the rest of their lives. When I was confirmed I had a sense that something special was happening but there was so much I didn't understand about the Christian faith and life. But a highlight of my life has been learning more and growing in the faith. And there's always more to learn. So you don't have to get it all right now. You just need to commit yourselves to learn more. "L" stands for "Learn" which is a vital and ongoing aspect of the Christian life.

Christians "A.G.L.O.W." And then the "O" stands for "OFFER" - offer your gifts for the work of God's Kingdom and the Church.

On the day of my own confirmation, I would have laughed out loud if someone had said that God would one day call me and use my gifts as an ordained Christian minister. But he has. And God has given each of you gifts for Christian ministry, perhaps not the kind of ministry I do (though you never know!) , but gifts for ministry and service nonetheless. Over the years God will help you discover and use those gifts. Offer those gifts back to God and the church. Put them to use. Your Christian life will grow and be fulfilled. Indeed, the church needs your gifts in order to grow and prosper and fulfill its mission. You shine as lights in the world. You are Christians "aglow."

Finally, the letter "W." That stands for the word "WITNESS."

Jesus said to the apostles, "You are my witnesses to the very ends of the earth." By word and deed, by your very way of living, you carry the life-saving and life-changing word of Jesus Christ to others. You show forth the truth about God and his love. You are witnesses to his saving power and grace. When someone asks you about why you live differently than many others, you can say, "It's because I am a follower of Jesus." Christians "aglow" are witnesses who help to win others for Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

So there it is. "You are children of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world." And Paul adds, "holding fast to the word of life." You and I are now, and we always will be, Christians aglow as we hold fast to the word of life, Jesus Christ. And the good news is that Jesus Christ always holds you and me more strongly than we hold to him. So if and when your hold on him grows weak, his hold on you will always remain strong. That is one of the greatest things I've learned in my Christian life - that Jesus' hold on me is far stronger than my hold on him. His love never lets us go. Jesus Christ, the word of life, is always and forever our hope and comfort. So hold fast to him, even as he holds fast to you.

Not that many years ago, when Christianity was still outlawed in China and driven underground, a young Christian was arrested for openly practicing and spreading her Christian faith. She was placed in solitary confinement in a cell with no windows and only a single light bulb. She was harassed by the guards, and one guard even shot out the light bulb in her cell, leaving her in complete darkness. The guards began to taunt her and called out, "We have taken away your light! Now what will you do?" She answered almost immediately and this is what she said, "Jesus is my light. He is the light that the darkness of the world can never overcome."