



A pathetic candle sat on a forgotten closet shelf. Years of knickknacks had elbowed it into the back of the dusty dimness. The thing was stubby and knobby and obviously amateur, with a whisker of a wick barely poking through the wax.

*Every human life has a little candle in it.  
Every human being, body and heart and mind and soul, has a little bit of candle.  
And each one of us has something pathetic about us.  
We all get weak and wicked, selfish and sinful.  
Gauge us by appearance, ability, or age, judge by size or skills or circumstances,  
and something always disqualifies, whether youngster or grown-up, unborn or elderly.*

The little candle happened to catch the attention of a young lady. She had inherited the unenviable task of boxing up and tossing out her late grandfather's assorted effects. In the littered farmhouse's soundless solitude, a faded memory steadily resurfaced. And it flooded a self-conscious blush from her forehead to her neckline.

He had asked her for help one overcast autumn afternoon. "Why don't we finish these last few tapers?" – as much to produce something useful as to pass on expertise and craft. He was sharing time and life and self with her. She'd gone through the motions – oblivious, reluctant, distracted – and thought the sorry outcome not worth keeping.

*The darkness finds its way in.  
And then the darkness finds its way out.  
In our relationships and vocations, me and you,  
we throw shade at neighbors and at one another.  
Why treat people – special, precious, priceless people –  
gifts from heaven and divine privileges as inconvenient?  
Who gains making gratification greater than goodness and my right more important than  
what's right?  
What benefit comes from holding ease and leisure above the true and ambition better than  
the beautiful?*

Apparently, Papa had decided differently. Now the little candle carried a complicated legacy of regret and yet affection. But this pitiful pile of wax suddenly seemed more special than it had at the outset. And the young lady couldn't bring herself to part with it. Returning home, she deposited the candle on her bedside table.

*Thanks be to God, we've gotten it wrong.  
Humble, gentle Jesus radiates light, life, and love in the unlikeliest of places and people.  
The Savior's compassion and servanthood, His forgiving grace,  
it shines in our darkneses, and the whole darkness has not, does not, will not, cannot  
overcome it.  
Christ crucified and come back again brings worth and purpose to everyone and  
everything.*

There it remained night after night. Youth yielded to adulthood and maturity elapsed into age. All along, its flickering light and huddled warmth warded off darkness and despair. Of course, it beckoned ongoing attention and upkeep. But the modest luminary eagerly exhausted its whole wick and wax in perky service. The candle stood steadfast sentry to recited dreams, solemn witness to whispered petitions, trusty assistant to scribbled ideas, and constant companion to quiet tears. Its flame, admittedly meager, had nevertheless kindled countless others.

At last the lady had little breath left. She could not kiss the candle goodnight and simply closed her eyes. So, with its final silver wisp, the pillar-become-a-puddle offered her a hand, and together they stretched heavenward. Even their burning out left the gloom that much weaker, and the Holy Fire who had both set and kept them ablaze beamed on brighter than ever.

*Come out of the shadows and into the shine.  
Receive life, your own and each other, as blessing.  
Rejoice and delight, with courage and care,  
even and especially where mortal eyes miss what matters.  
Share the life and immortality Jesus Christ has brought to light,  
because this the very gates of hell itself shall never prevail against. Amen.*

**"Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light" (2 Timothy 3:10).**

**"In him was life, and the life was the light of all humankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4-5).**

Come out of the shadows and into the shine.

Rejoice like Lutherans and embrace the sanctity of every human life!