
VIP

It was a two minute conversation, perhaps three at the most. The barista was making the coffee, two medium cups, one flat white and one cappuccino, whilst the other lady collected my ten dollars and stamped the loyalty-card. Every Wednesday, Eileen and I forget about switching on our coffee-machine, Instead, I will search our suburban bakeries for a couple of delicious cakes, followed by a visit to our local coffee-shop.

“You have changed my life,” she said whilst depositing the money into the till.

I must have had a surprised look on my face and this prompted her to reveal details of a conversation that had taken place a couple of months ago.

“You told me that if I was to say aloud each morning ‘I am patient and I am kind’ and repeat these verses several times during the day, it would change my life.”

The young lady provided further detail during our three minute conversation, sharing how memorizing those two verses had positively impacted on the life of her entire family.

“You have changed my life,” she repeated, presenting me with two delicious cups of coffee.

“I am a Christian and these two verses are from the Bible and have changed my life as well,” I replied. “See you next Wednesday.”

There are a number of very important people (VIP) in my life. Eileen, my dear wife, is on the top of that list. Sharing my life with my dear wife is a wonderful blessing. No doubt, your spouse, family-members and friends are on your personal VIP list. The church-family is also a unity of wonderful VIP’s, united by a common faith and hope in Jesus Christ.

There are a few VIP’s in my life, friends with a common interest. It may be a love for fishing, sailing or watercolour-painting, because these are my hobbies. But there is one person, one VIP, with whom I hardly ever communicate nowadays. By now this man has reached middle-age and during the last twenty-nine years we have communicated only once via telephone. And yet, I shall never forget his name and how richly he has blessed me. This man has changed my life.

Twenty-nine years ago we played a round of golf, walking along the Bribie Island fairways. It was a lovely day. There were three of us and Don explained that he had an invisible friend, named Jesus, who would dearly love to be my friend also.

“He will change and bless your life,” Don said.

We had almost reached the end of our game when Don presented me with this life-saving question.

“Would you like to know Jesus as your friend and Lord?”

When religious people came knocking on the front-door on many a Saturday mornings, it never demanded much effort to move them along.

“Sorry, but I’m too busy. It’s Saturday.”

However, when this surprising golf-course offer was made, during a normal conversation, it would change my life forever. I was forty-two at the time. Unbeknown to me my life was soon to fall apart. It was then that I realised that God had reached out to this middle-aged man, who in the past had relied on his own cleverness and plans, never considering prayer to be an earthly solution.

At age forty-two my life changed on this golf-course, because Jesus arrived, walking along those lush green fairways. There I gave my life to Jesus Christ, thanked him for saving a helpless and lost sinner, and promised to follow my Lord for the rest of my life.

“How precious did that grace appear, which saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.”

John Newton’s words are also mine, and no doubt yours as well. Isn’t that the reason why we are here this morning, because we belong to God, through Jesus Christ?

During my forty-year career as a professional photographer I have met people from all walks of life, and some of those were quite famous. One day Mr. Universe flexed his muscles in my studio, the World number one tennis-player stood smiling in front of my camera. Miss Australia was seated next to me during a flight in a six-seater plane and we talked like friends who had known each other for years. Olympic medallist swimmers and world-record-holders posed under the strong lights of my studio, and the list could go on.

Despite all these amazing people, having been part of my life, in many cases for just a brief moment, there is one person who stands out from all the rest of those people. It is of course, Don, because Don was the man with the blessed feet, who introduced me to Jesus, my Saviour and Lord who has been living in my heart since that day on the Bribie Island golf-course.

Today we are confronted with a challenging gospel account. Let us listen again to the words spoken by Jesus.

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine sheep in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?”

Somewhere, during your life and mine, a VIP has introduced you to Jesus. That, I may suggest, is the reason for your presence here in the house of God. Your salvation, your baptism may have occurred when you were young. Some of you may have got to know Jesus during your teenage-years or perhaps later, like me, all due to a VIP in your life.

Let us consider for a moment that you and I, the members of this church family, we are the sheep safely grazing on the meadow, and now one of those got lost. This person could be someone who was once a member of our church-congregation, but no longer wishes to attend on Sundays, because something has upset this person. The “lost sheep”, as Jesus describes the lost soul, can also be a family-member, a friend, a stranger or a lady employed in a coffee-shop.

Lutheran schools and colleges were created to bring the message of Jesus Christ to young souls, and what a wise decision. It is my opinion that every Lutheran school and college should never be without a pastor. Currently this church does not have a pastor, but I am comforted by the knowledge that we are the kind of sheep that are grazing on a safe meadow. Our schools, however, are filled with young minds, young lost sheep. But to add to this, each one of us has a personal responsibility, as today’s Gospel account clearly outlines.

The lost sheep are not in this building.

We meet in this church once a week for one hour. During the remaining 167 hours of the week we live and breathe life outside this church, amongst the lost sheep. That’s why I encourage you to be courageous in your faith in Jesus. Ask God in prayer how you may influence the mind of a lost sheep as you journey through each day.

“I am a Christian,” someone may say.

“I believe in Jesus,” another will courageously state.

“I go to church, that’s why I can’t make it on Sunday morning to your party.”

These comments can be life-changing and life-giving, not just in a coffee shop, but you too can be a VIP. But in many cases it is our loving actions and behaviour which will influence the minds of others, because love is a gift from God.

So let’s end this message with the words from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

“And when he finds the lost sheep, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, Rejoice with me, I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.”

And may the peace of God, which transcends all human understanding, guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen