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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
May 4, 2014  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Ezekiel 34:11-16, John 21:1-14  
Hymns: 363; 404; 399; 52 (248:1-3 – Gloria)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and  
our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Revelation 2:1-5

“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,  
‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His  
right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden  
lampstands: 2 “I know your works, your labor, your  
patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil.  
And you have tested those who say they are apostles and  
are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have  
persevered and have patience, and have labored for My  
name’s sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless  
I have this against you, that you have left your first love.  
5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen;  
repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you  
quickly and remove your lampstand from its  
place—unless you repent.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Risen Savior, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Easter celebrates a great victory.

Every year we rejoice with a renewed joy. Coming out of the solemn season of lent, we are ready to sing our “Hallelujahs,” and rejoice in the resurrection. We come out of the Lenten season with a renewed appreciation of all that Jesus suffered for us, to redeem us from sin, to redeem us to God. Now in the Easter season, we take time to meditate on the wonders of salvation which our Risen Savior has secured for us, and how this impacts our lives. Indeed as we consider the blessings of the resurrection and eternal life we find our cause in life, that which moves us to live according to the holy will of God. We do all –

**THEME: For the Love of Jesus.**

In our text this morning we have before us the first of the seven letters of Revelation, letters which the Lord Jesus as our Risen and glorified Lord presented to the Church through the Apostle John. Jesus opens these letters with a statement so that we might --

### **I. Know the Blessing of Jesus’ Presence.**

**Revelation 2:1** “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

In the imagery of Revelation Jesus presented truths with pictures so we might grasp the wonders of His grace. The seven stars and the seven golden lampstands are such images. Seven is a number signifying God's gracious dealing with the earth. And so Jesus wrote these letters to the seven churches, indeed Jesus presented these letters to John for all the churches then and now to be instructed by them. And Jesus wanted all to know that He was with them with His blessing. The seven stars are those pastors who the Lord would use to give light to His Church on earth. The messengers of the gospel in the midst of the congregations come with the Lord's blessing even as they come with the Lord's Word that His people might see the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthian 4:6). The lampstands represent the true Christian faith found in Christian congregations, the true faith that comes to us in the gospel of Christ, our crucified and Risen Lord.

Jesus shines into our hearts through the gospel. It is the will of our Lord and Savior that this gospel flourish in our midst. To that end it must be regarded as sacred and inviolate. One is not to mess with that message of Christ crucified. Neither is one to neglect that message. As the gospel is proclaimed among us Jesus walks among us. He abides with us through the proclamation of His Word that we might be blessed by Him in all our ways, and through all our days. When we gather here it is not only a gathering of those whom we see with our physical eyes, but we appreciate the presence of Him whom we see only with eyes of faith. How blessed we are to know Jesus our Lord is among us.

He is among us and He knows all that is going on among us. He knows our struggles, and He knows all that we do

and endure for His name's sake. He knows what is in our hearts and how we believe the gospel, and He sees how we --

## II. Respond with Fruits of Orthodoxy.

The congregation in Ephesus has quite an impressive sounding record of faithfulness.

**Revelation 2:2-3** “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.”

Imagine how the congregation would respond upon their first reading of this letter and hear the Lord list these fruits of faith that He saw in this congregation. Surely that is what each of these actions must be – **fruits of faith!** In defense of the Savior and the truth of salvation they had done many things, works that glorified the Lord. Jesus adds the word “**labor.**” They were really involved in the ministry and did not shirk the duties that were before them as believers, as disciples who followed Jesus in their lives. They went forward with **patience** and **endurance.** They persevered in their faith in Jesus. When other teachers came along, they put them to the test of Holy Scripture, to see if they were true teachers of Christ our Savior. They refused to compromise the truth of Jesus as our crucified and risen Lord. They also stood up against the evil in the world around them. They refused to cave in to the pressure of a wicked society and conform their lives to the ways of the world. They lived their lives as Christ would have them live.

Jesus concluded that they **“labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.”** That is quite a statement to come from the Lord Jesus toward anybody!

May the Lord see such fruits in our lives also! Isn’t that how we should respond to this inventory of faithfulness to the Lord? One would assume so! And would we be deserving of such praise? Have we resisted the errors and the evil of this world as did those early Christians in Ephesus? Surely the world is still very evil yet today, maybe even more so! So much of that evil is being defended by the world and sometimes even celebrated by the world as good, and fun, and even wholesome. Such a prevailing attitude toward evil can easily wear down a Christian’s resolve. It may make it increasingly difficult for a congregation of believers to take a firm stand against the sin. It may be more difficult as time goes by to maintain church discipline when evil encroaches the congregation. It may be more difficult to stand up against the lies from within (lies about the Bible being full of error and myth,) and lies from without, (lies mischaracterizing the church and its individual members as being hateful, and evil, and bigoted) all because we will not embrace that which we know from the Word of God as being wrong and evil, and dangerous to our souls.

Surely our response is to pray for patient endurance, that we also may remain faithful to the Lord and His gospel in the face of the evil of this world. To this end may God help us!

However the Lord was NOT completely happy with the way of things in the Ephesian congregation. He confronts them with a need for --

### III. Reclaiming Your First Love.

**Revelation 2:4-5** Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent

Jesus calls for the people of the Ephesian congregation to repent. Repentance implies that all was NOT RIGHT with the congregation. What were they doing wrong? The wrong was not outward. What was wrong was the state of their hearts. Jesus said that they had left their **first love**. Jesus said that they had fallen from where they had been. Jesus called upon them to do their **first works**. They needed to repent. They needed to confess their sin, and change their way of thinking about their congregational life and service to the Lord.

First love and first works characterize that which comes from that fervent love that burns within one's soul when one first comes to know and believe in Jesus as our Savior from sin and death. When that love fades then doing all the right things, even when doing them to the glory of the Lord, can become mundane service, nothing more than a fulfillment of duty. The joy was gone. Too much of what the Ephesian Christians were doing was being done because they knew that was what was expected of them.

Jesus was quite serious about this sad state of the faith of this congregation. He was serious enough about this to warn them that to continue in this lesser service would endanger the presence of the gospel in their midst. It was

slipping away from them even as their love was growing cold. If that continued the lampstand could be taken away. Eventually that's what happened. The Ephesian congregation isn't there anymore. It's gone, even as Ephesus is gone.

Now Jesus wants every congregation to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Do you hear the message the Lord is sharing with us?

It isn't enough for us to "orthodox." It isn't enough that we condemn sin in the world. It isn't enough that we make our church offerings and are faithful in church attendance. The Lord looks at our hearts. Are we doing what we do because we feel like we have to, because it is our duty, or is it still flowing from a heart filled with the love of Christ? If we are serving the Lord from compulsion then we also should repent of the coldness in our own hearts. We also should wake ourselves out of our spiritual daze, and look again at the wonders of love with which Christ has loved us! He suffered for us, and died and was buried. He rose again for our justification. He called us through the gospel, and by sending His Spirit among us has kept us in true faith. These are wonders of His grace. Let us behold the wonder of His love. Let us light the fire of love within our heart with the gospel, and then let us "**serve the Lord with gladness**" (Psalm 100:2). Let us dedicate our hearts to serve Him all our days! May all see in us not just dedication to the truth, but the joy of salvation and the love of our Savior that drives us to live to the praise and glory of our crucified and risen and ever-living Lord.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.