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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
May 3, 2015
4th Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 5:1-7, John 15:1-11
Hymns: 239; 215; 411:1-5; 50:2 (248:1-3)

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

Sermon Text: Revelation 3:7-11

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,
‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”’: 8 “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, Our Risen Lord, fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: BFF.

Who's your BFF? For me the expression brings into my mind the image of some young teenage girls as they make silly pledges to be

friends forever. Seriously, maybe this is something we should give some serious thought. Do you have a forever kind of best friend? Is it a sibling? Is it your spouse? I think of my wife as my closest friend. But then she has friends that she has known since she was a little girl growing up in Wisconsin, friends she still talks to on the phone from time to time. Maybe they are her BFFs. But forever is long, long time. Can any relationship here on earth really be a forever relationship? There is a BFF that we all share, at least those of us who know Him. We couldn't have a better friend! We couldn't have a friend who has done more for us, sacrificed more for us. We couldn't have a more faithful and true friend. And it is indeed possible for Him to be a BFF with each and every one of us. He doesn't need to pick out one favorite. He has chosen us all to be His friend, and even His family.

Our text addresses the congregational nature of our friendship with Jesus, our crucified and risen Savior. He who lives forever is indeed our best Friend forever! He is faithful and true and we as a congregation are to be busy encouraging one another in maintaining our friendship with the Lord. Jesus addressed the congregation in Philadelphia as --

THEME: A Congregation Staying Close to Jesus.

As I said, Jesus is the kind of friend that is kind and generous with the gifts that He has to offer. A congregation that stays close to Jesus is --

I. Blessed by the Keys of David.

In this letter to Philadelphia Jesus says:

Revelation 3:7-8a “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”’: 8 “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it;”

The world around the early Christians was loaded with temptations and lusts and all sorts of evil. All this hedonistic sin was accepted by society without any thought being given that something might

be wrong or wicked. The world looked at the Christians in their midst as being peculiar for not sharing in the pleasures of this life. The Lord saw that they resisted the allurements of the world. He saw their faith. They knew that only Jesus was holy. They knew Jesus as the one who is true. He came into the world and promised to give life to those who followed Him in faith. They forsook the world and the ways of the world and Jesus assured them of everlasting life. Jesus, who is not only the Son of God but also the Son David, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, holds the key to the kingdom of heaven. He brought this congregation the assurance that their faith in Him was not in vain. He **“gives them eternal life, and they shall never perish”** (John 10:28)! Jesus with His perfect righteousness, and His innocent sufferings and death, and His resurrection has opened the door to heaven. Jesus assured the Philadelphia congregation that the door to heaven would remain open for them.

This blessing came to this congregation because they stayed close to Jesus. And that is the lesson for us as well. Jesus comes to us with the same assurance of His blessing of eternal life. Even as we dwell in the midst of a wicked world, we are assured that we will be with the Lord in heaven where we shall see Him in all His holy glory, and dwell before Him forevermore. He has opened a door for us, redeeming us from sin and death. He has called us to be His own people. **He** has opened the door, and no one can shut it. He holds the key to heaven. He alone! It’s all about staying close to Jesus! The one who stays close to Jesus --

II. Possesses Patient Endurance.

That is what Jesus credited to this congregation.

Revelation 3:8-10a “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere,”

Jesus knew what was going on in the lives of the members of this congregation. He knew what was going on with the Philadelphia congregation as a whole. He was pleased with how they lived their faith. He was pleased that they stayed in the Word. He saw that they realized that they had little strength, but they called upon the strength that was there for them in the Word of Christ. They were not deceived by the lies or tripped up by the false tactics of those who claimed to have some higher truth from the past traditions that was needed to supplement the gospel. They persevered in the face of all the pressures that were brought against them in their confession of the truth.

Sometimes certain expressions are difficult to translate. Sometimes translators try too hard to come up with something more than the simple words given by inspiration. The expression “Because you have kept my command to persevere” sounds very laudable, but what this congregation had actually done was “kept the Word of patience.” Jesus gave His Word to His Church on earth that they might find the strength to persevere. He gave us His promises of life so that we might endure the trials and tribulations of this life and learn patience of faith while doing so. That is what the Philadelphian Christians had done. They stayed close to Jesus by staying in His Word. Staying in His Word they gained the patience to persevere in the faith even in the face of trials and false teachers.

The result of this patient endurance in the truth of the Gospel would be that in the end the false teachers, those who had tried to either intimidate or deceive the congregation, would bow before them and acknowledge that these Philadelphian Christians had possessed the truth of Jesus all along.

In these words we find an important lesson about staying close to Jesus. We don't stay close to Jesus simply by claiming to do so. We stay close to Jesus by staying in His Word. There are still many today who claim a superior understanding of the Word of God, and tell us that we are too old fashioned and behind the times in our understanding of the gospel. There are people in this world that refer to Christian congregations who adhere to a literary understanding of God's Word as being radical, even dangerous fundamentalists. We are laughed at, scoffed, ridiculed, and may find ourselves at the receiving end of a rant. We stay in the Word

of patience, learning patience from Him who endured far more at the hands of sinful men for us and for our salvation. And so we stay close to Jesus. We need to be connected to Him for that connection is life itself. That connection assures that faithful Christians will be --

III. Preserved From Evil.

Our text concludes with this assurance,

Revelation 3:10-11 “Because you have kept My command to persevere, (Again that should read “Because you have kept my Word of patience) I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”

We need to remember that John wrote the Book of Revelation from exile on the island of Patmos because it was a time of active persecution in the world. While the congregation in Philadelphia had encountered opposition in teaching and living the truth, it is apparent that the congregation had not been called upon to endure the more extreme persecutions that many others before and after them had been called upon to endure. And yet the Lord states that this trial, this test of faith would come upon the whole world. Why were they reassured in this way? Because they had kept the Word of patience. They had stayed close to the Lord Jesus by staying in His Word, by hearing again and again the promises of the Lord to sustain His people, to keep them safely in His hands, to bring them to eternal glory. They knew, by faith in Jesus that they would be saved to eternal life.

Jesus wrapped it up with the final assurance that He as coming quickly, a promise Jesus repeats at the end of the book of Revelation. These things, including the sufferings of this present time are transitory. They shall pass away. They shall cease and more quickly than we might be led to believe by the world. Do not doubt the Word of promise. Jesus is coming and He is coming quickly. Hold on tight to the precious truth that we have in Christ Jesus. Don't let it slip away. That was Jesus' message for the

Philadelphian Christians, and it remains His message for Christians yet today.

In recent sermons and classes we have talked about the tests and the persecutions that are being endured by many Christians in so many countries around the world right now. Every week brings new reports of Christians being tortured, abused, or even killed simply because they confess that Jesus is Lord. These reports from other lands put the ridicule we may endure into a little different perspective. We are being spared a great deal of hardship and grief and it is not because we are so good. This is a gift of grace in Christ Jesus. We should appreciate what a precious thing it is that we can gather around the Word and hear it taught in its truth and purity without fear of being arrested or otherwise viciously attacked. The Lord assures us of His gracious presence. We are blessed, however we should not take this gift of freedom of religion for granted. We should exercise it and stay in the Word and be strengthened in our faith and in our life that we might glorify the Lord in our daily walk. We have but a brief time in this life in which we might serve the Lord by sharing His gospel with other lost sinners.

Jesus is coming quickly. It could be yet today, tomorrow or later this week. We should not assume that we have all the time in the world to fulfill our role in this life, to draw others closer to the Lord, or for us to come closer to the Lord. He is coming quickly! Yes, it might be weeks or months or even years. God knows, but that is part of the point, **only God knows** and we should live our lives as if that Day is tomorrow, and not as if it is so far down the road it doesn't apply to us in our lives. The Lord is coming quickly, and we have every advantage in the fact that we are not enduring the harshest persecution. We have every advantage to serve the Lord freely and fully with our lives.

Don't get sloppy in your spiritual habits, in your spiritual life that you might allow someone else to steal away the crown of life the Lord has reserved for you. Stay in the Word. Stay closely connected to Jesus as your Lord and Savior who loves you, and has called you to life everlasting. Stay connected to Him because Jesus really is your Best Friend Forever!

AMEN.

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