

**Trinity UMC Iron Mountain, MI**  
**May 27, 2018 Pastor Geri**

**Second Reading**

Revelation 2: 1- 7

Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus.

This is the message

from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand,  
the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands:

“I know all the things you do.

I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance.

I know you don't tolerate evil people.

You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles  
but are not.

You have discovered they are liars.

You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.

“But I have this complaint against you.

You don't love me or each other as you did at first!

Look how far you have fallen!

Turn back to me and do the works you did at first.

If you don't repent,

I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.

But this is in your favor:

You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do.

Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit

and understand what he is saying to the churches.

To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life  
in the paradise of God.

**Sermon**

*‘Keep First Things First’*

Pastor Geri

So...This is the message

from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand,  
the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands:

We know this the message from Jesus...but what about those stars and the lampstands? Rev.

1:20 tells us that the

Stars are the Angels of the 7 churches. Nice to think that each church has a special angel  
assigned to it, yes?

The Lampstands are the 7 churches.

So...why these 7 churches? When there were so many churches in the Mediterranean area?

Conclusion: These 7 churches represent the various accomplishments and challenges faced by  
churches everywhere.

Each of the seven churches has different issues but together, they represent the issues of all  
churches throughout history.

We, as a community of faith, can get kind of tunnel vision, lose perspective...by isolating  
ourselves from other churches. Or by assuming that all churches have the same problems we do.  
But Jesus knows the truth about us now, just like he knew the truth about the church in Ephesus.

And isn't it wonderful to hear Jesus telling the Ephesians how well they are doing?

"I know all the things you do.

I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance.

I know you don't tolerate evil people.

You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles  
but are not.

You have discovered they are liars.

You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.

Gosh, those are words of encouragement, aren't they?

Jesus knows the struggles and the challenges and compliments the Ephesians. Let's them know that they are getting it right!

Were Jesus to send an angel to talk to us today at Trinity, what encouragement would we receive? I would like to think it would have something to do with our Jubilee effort and sincere desire to find out what God wants of us. Maybe Jesus would have our Angel tell us: Good work on those Jubilee Prayers! Keep reading the Bible every day! And honor your history...all the great people who came before you and made this church happen!

But, as so often happens, compliments only go so far and then comes the complaints. Which can be a form of encouragement too...but are harder to hear. The angel carries the message from Jesus to the Ephesians:

"But I have this complaint against you.

You don't love me or each other as you did at first!

Look how far you have fallen!

Ah...yes, Jesus could see into the hearts of the Ephesians and something was missing. Jesus looked and saw that the heart of the church in that time and that place was running low on love. Love for him was fading. Love for each other was on the decline.

And that's a problem for the churches who claim Jesus as their Lord because when he walked the earth, both before and after Resurrection, Jesus said, Love one another. Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your enemies even. They will know you are my people by your love for each other.

And you know. And I know. People can tell if someone is doing what they're doing because they are supposed to. Or because they're trying to get something out of it. Or doing it because they said they would but really, they would rather be doing something else. And people can tell...if someone is doing what they are doing out of love.

I have read so many wonderful testimonies about how so many of you love this Trinity UMC. That's so heart-warming. Gives me goose-bumps. It's good to love the church. But you heard Jesus' words didn't you?

You don't love me or each other as you did at first!

Look how far you have fallen!

Loving the church is not sufficient if we don't love Jesus and love each other.

In this letter to the Ephesians...Jesus doesn't go into an analysis of what causes love to fade. He knows. He lived with us. He saw people who were tired. Discouraged. Worn out. It's hard to keep the love alive in those circumstances.

Jesus knew people who were angry. And hurt. And jealous. And disgusted with each other. And not able to even ask God to bring forgiveness and healing to a situation that needed a gentle touch and God's grace to be set right. That'll kill love for sure.

He didn't have to analyze the Ephesians just like he doesn't need to analyze us or any other church who is living with less and less love as time goes by. Because Jesus knows the problem and he offers up a solution...Jesus says:

**Turn back to me and do the works you did at first.**

The works that he is talking about are the fun and exciting and inspired activities that come out of a deep reservoir of love for God and God's world. Can you remember ever feeling and operating from that fountain of living water and eternal love that Jesus offers to those who believe in him? Do you still have that sense and joy of loving the people who are sitting around you and having fun doing stuff with them?

Part of what I'm doing in this Jubilee year is asking people here at Trinity...when and where were you when you felt the presence of Jesus and his love for you? I've heard some powerful stories of Camp Michigamme fireside experiences. Some of you were involved with Fire UP! Billy Graham's son, Franklin came to the UP, I understand. And right here, in this sanctuary, maybe a sermon or Communion or a choir song and the Spirit of the Lord in this place came upon you and you felt it. And you knew. Jesus loves you and you get to love everyone in the whole world...and you get to act in the world as one who is loved and as one who does love. Jesus says...turn back to me. First things first.

It's so easy to lose the love. I'm not sure why God made us with such short term memories and such distractible brains. Seems like there is always something shiny to move us away from what we know is most valuable. Our treasure is in the love of Jesus for us and the treasure we have to share with the world is the love that can pour out of us and make all the difference.

The Ephesians were losing it. The first thing had become maybe the third thing or the thirtieth thing. Or maybe it had disappeared altogether. But Jesus said...it's simple...Just turn back to me and keep first things first.

Cover.

So in the letter to the Ephesians, Jesus offers encouragement and compliments. He states the problem and offers a solution.

Then he goes on quickly to clarify the consequences of staying the same, rather than moving forward:

**If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.**

If we don't repent the lack of love, the church may not survive.

Without love, a church cannot survive as a church.

Without love, a church cannot stand with other churches in unity.

When we let go of our love for each other, Jesus will remove the charter and the glue that binds his people together as a church.

Revelation has lots of scary beasts and dragons and the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse later in the book.

But the scariest thing of all, to me, personally...is that our failure to repent of our lack of love for each other means that Jesus can and could remove our place from among the churches.

The Revelation of John is intended to make us aware, us as the Church in Iron Mountain, that we too, like the Church in Ephesus, like churches throughout history and the world, could well be in danger of having our lampstand removed from its place among the churches—if our love for Jesus and each other has fallen off too far for too long. Let those who have eyes to see and ears to hear be faithful in seeing and listening.

I am heading off to Annual Conference on Wednesday this week. I'll be around people from all different churches throughout the state of Michigan.

As happens every year...in worship, we will be called to affirm our love for Jesus and remember that love for God's world and God's people everywhere is a First thing that needs to be kept first.

I ask for your prayers. Because yes, our United Methodist church throughout the world right now is straining to hear the voice of the Spirit and understand what is being said to the churches of our time and place.

Issues of doctrine, Bible interpretation, right action relative to the issue of homosexuality are front and center, this year as they have been for many years.

This letter to the Ephesians could just as easily been written to The United Methodist Church.

Because the love we all first knew from Jesus must be rescued from the shuffle of competing interests and factional thinking. We are not put here by God to argue and become filled with anger and bitterness.

No...Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, makes it clear:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoice in the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

And so I close with these words from the letter to the Romans which seem to have foreseen John's Revelation to the church in Ephesus.

Romans 15: 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony (and in love) with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen