

Revelation #2

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Eastertide is what we call the 50 days after Easter and before Pentecost. It reflects a shift from the focusing on the cross and the resurrection to anticipation, celebration, and remembering the giving of the Holy spirit to first the 120 disciples in the Upper Room and then on all of all. Traditionally, Eastertide is about joy and feasting and wearing new clothes. This is where we are! We are not yet in the kingdom of God fully yet we have hope. Anticipation and reality create a tension.

Let's read this together: sink into this psalm and let the words flow over you.

Psalm 139:1-18

1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
3 You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
4 Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
5 You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.
7 Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
9 If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

13 For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and
wonderfully made.[a]
Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it
very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.
17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O
God!
How vast is the sum of them!
18 If I would count them, they are more than the
sand.
I awake, and I am still with you.

There's a saying for someone who is struggling and wants to go far away: "Wherever you go, there you are." You cannot run away from your problems. This psalm says wherever you go, whatever is happening, Jesus is there. But not just there with spy cameras watching you: he knows you intimately and cares deeply about you

and what you're thinking and doing. Hold on to this because this is the God who is talking to the churches in Revelation.

Let's pause for a moment and consider what it is like to be a child at the Village. Thursdays at 3:30 there is a Christian Living Class taught by John O'Hair for our 9-14 year old. John once taught this at Desert Christian HS to seniors and has amended it to bring to our children. Last week, I had to attend and when I arrived, a young man stood up and yelled to me, "I love this class! Look at my Bible that I just got! Look at my tabs!" He had an intense excitement! I was even more excited when I saw them reviewing the previous week's class. He asked them to turn to one another and tell what a goal is, a desire is, a demand is, and how you can turn desires into sinful patterns. These are words that are a big part of the Village...it was beautiful to see their enthusiasm about these things.

Now onto Revelation 2:1-7 and we can tie all this together. Revelation actually means to remove the veil and show us things that are being revealed to us.

I love what Mark said last week that he loved that we are so used to our Gospel pictures of Jesus. But here in Revelation, we don't find the usual picture. Instead we find him with a sword in his mouth, ascended, ruling, brilliant, bronze feet, impressively scary, like a Son of Man. So let's think about Psalm 139: the Jesus who made you and is with you wherever you go is also this Jesus.

John is the beloved disciple who also loves Jesus and says when he saw Jesus like this, he fell at his feet as though he were dead. As we listen to what Jesus says to us, please know that this should also be our response: to fall down! But after John fell down, Jesus touched his shoulder. One of my favorite things is when someone does this to me and says, "Eric, it's good to see you." Jesus then says to John (and to you):

Rev 1:17 "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. **18** I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

No one can take you away from Jesus: He is alive forever and he is putting his hand on your shoulder and telling you not to be afraid in the midst of everything going on in your life. But he does have some things to tell each church.

The number SEVEN comes up about 50 times in the Bible; it's the number of completion. We need to think about these letters differently about these letters: they are to the entire church. As Americans, we want them to apply to us and we want to know what we should do. But think of these letters communally, as a message to us collectively as a church. What is it inviting us to as a church?

The basic pattern of each letter is Affirmation, Reproach, Correction. We often read Paul's letters in the New Testament. But these letters are from Jesus; they are direct words to you.

This letter is going to go to Ephesus so we should first know a little about these people. Acts 16-20 can expand this. Ephesus is part of Asia Minor and the first city you would come to. Think of them like this: they were the first to get internet and instagram. They have more strip clubs and bars, and cult worship was integrated into everything. They were a free Roman city and were a very wealthy shipping port. It sounds like us! (Actually, all of the cities are like us but Ephesus is REALLY like us.) Tourism is a very big thing in Ephesus: Artemis temple is for fertility rites and worship is integrated into the community. This is where the church of the Ephesians is located. Paul gives a message to the elders in Acts 20 and warns them not to let the wolves, the false teachers, come in and take advantage of them. They are bombarded nonstop. There is morality everywhere. Into this, Jesus has words to this church. Most likely, this church was very small: may 15 houses with 10 people each. This letter would have been passed around and read to all of these little churches.

Rev 2:1-7

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

He is saying, “If you don’t remember, it’s me, Jesus, we are talking about.” He holds these lights and messengers: this is the One John was afraid of and he is walking among us and holding the stars:

2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance.

So far, this sounds good. It actually means “you work hard until you sweat.”

I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people,

This is even better!

you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

I have not met anyone who says they are an apostle. In the early church, these were messengers who go from church to church and help them do their ministry. There were rules for this: they stayed for 3 days and then sent them on their way. But Jesus says the Ephesians didn’t accept any new additions to the gospel.

3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

In a place where they were continually bombarded by worship of idols, wealth, and debauchery, they have held onto Jesus. These were radical disciples passionate about following Jesus. But with all these things, there is a problem.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken (left) the love you had at first.

I have heard sermons on this before that compare this to eros (marriage) love but this is the love of Christ, agape, sacrificing himself for us. What he is saying is that their priorities were wrong and upside down. Paul says

I Cor 13:11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

When you are an adult, you talk and think like an adult, not a child. Notice that Paul never says that he left his child's heart behind and got an adult heart instead.

Mark 10:13-16 People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. **14** When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. **15** Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." **16** And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

I think Jesus is saying that the Ephesians made secondary things (working hard, protection from evil) a priority and as a result lost a child-like wonder for Jesus. Like the boy whom I mentioned earlier who was so excited about his Bible or the children eagerly discussing goals and desires. When I was little, I would play with my Star Wars characters for hours, forgetting everything else. I had the wonder of a child. This is lost when your "adulthood" takes priority over a childlike heart. The results are a cold dry faith that is legalistic and anti-relationship.

There is a remedy for this, though!

5 Consider how far you have fallen!

Consider means to remember, think back, and rehearse. Jesus wants them to remember when they had a child-like love and trace back how they have fallen from it; he wants them to understand how this happened. This is the first step. Thinking about the Village 20 years ago, we wanted to be in a place where we could be free to be creative and to have a space where people could explore who Jesus is without boxes around them. Have we lost this? Are there places where you have lost your childlikeness?

Repent and do the things you did at first.

There is an invitation to repent, to acknowledge what has happened, and change as you move forward. Repenting is not to despair! It invites you to DO SOMETHING, to walk in a new direction. We are to do the things that we used to do when we acted out of a child-like heart. This is simple, not complicated. We like to have lots of rules but these instructions are simple.

There is a consequence of not repenting:

Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

There is a lot of imagery going on here: know that churches have a light to shine in the darkness. If a church refuses to repent, their impact and influence will be taken out. If a person refuses, this impact is also diminished. This doesn't pertain to salvation; it is about impact.

6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

We don't know a lot about this. We do know that the Nicolaitans were trying to integrate sexual activity and food sacrificed to idols into their practices.

7 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Paradise sounds like Eden. The tree of life is in the Garden of Eden. He is saying that if you were victorious, you would have JESUS. This may also refer to the shrines and temples of Artemis, which had gardens and in the middle a tree of life. The temple had a fertility tree which, if you worshiped it, would give you offspring. But Jesus is saying that if you would grab onto a child-like heart, you may have life.

Here is a video of a child talking like an adult. It expresses what it means to be a Christian with a child-life heart. [▶ Aww! 4-year-old's adorable heart-to-heart with mom | New York Post](#)

What struck me about this video is that it shows what it looks like to have an innocent, childlike heart but also being about the things of God. It's a beautiful conversation between a mother and child.

The letter to Ephesus is an invitation to re-prioritize: have I given myself to getting it all right to the point where my heart for Jesus is secondary? The invitation is to RE-PRIORITIZE and have genuine honest conversations with Jesus, just like the boy in the video.

Questions from Vespers:

How can you go back and do things like you once did when you're not that same person as before? -Part of stepping back into a childlike heart are the bad memories.

In thinking about American churches, the public face is like Ephesus because it's very focused on morality issues. It's troubling but the flip side is that I have been able to offer love in a pure way and its been rejected. It's almost easier to focus on the morality battles than be vulnerable and offer love. -Not to minimize this, when we have a childlike heart, it does make us vulnerable to being wounded but it's for the sake of Christ and we are deeply loved.

Other than God giving us Jesus, the other ultimate gift to us is CHOICE. It's my choice to have a child-like joy in my heart. I pray for it because in the end, it helps get past all the hurt. And with it comes wisdom. I believe its a choice. -If you go back to January when I talked about Radical Courage, to not drift away from Jesus, we have to repeat our stories and remember them. There is power in these.

Questions from Matins:

Jesus was praising the Ephesians for not tolerating wicked people. How do we do this? We are a very welcoming community; what would this look like? -Paul tells the Ephesians when a person preys on the weakness of your community, this was not to be tolerated. If there is an intent to destroy, this should be dealt with.

Why does it say that Jesus looked like a Son of Man? -this is a phrase that is in a lot of Biblical literature. Revelation is the **only** apocalyptic letter in the NT. This reference is a clarification of all the OT literature references; Son of Man was used a lot in the OT. He is now revealing who the real Son of Man is: the Messiah.