

Revelation

SERMON SERIES, CHAPTER 2

“Staying In Love”

Several children were asked their opinions about love and dating. Here's what they said:

WHAT IS FALLING IN LOVE LIKE? Roger, age 9, said: What's falling in love like? “Like an avalanche where you have to run for your life.”

Regina, age 10, said: “I'm not rushing into being in love. I'm finding 4th grade hard enough.”

Alonzo, age 9, was asked how to make someone fall in love with you. He said: “Don't do things like have smelly green sneakers. You might get attention, but attention ain't the same thing as love.”

AND, WHEN IS IT OKAY TO KISS SOMEONE? Allan, age 10, said, “You should never kiss a girl unless you have enough bucks to buy her a ring and her own DVD player, 'cause she'll want to have videos of the wedding.”

Children's insights on love and marriage are wonderful, aren't they?

We're in a sermon series on the Bible book of Revelation. This is without a doubt the most challenging and the most misunderstood book in the Bible. Today we're in chapter 2 and Jesus turns His attention to us – to His Church. He wants to get His people ready for what lies ahead in the future. He examines 7 churches in Asia Minor, what is now the country of Turkey.

The situations of these 7 churches apply to all believers of all time – even to us. And each of these letters has a format. Each begins with a ♦ Description of Christ in His Power and Glory, ♦ then He commends each Church on what they're doing well. ♦ Next Jesus issues a Call to Repentance and Change (He tells them what needs fixing). ♦ And finally, He ends with a Promise of God's Blessing.

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There's a story told of a husband who went with his wife to her 35th high school reunion. While the woman was reminiscing with some of her old friends, a man approached the husband and admitted, "Years ago I was madly in love with your wife." The husband said, "So was I."

Isn't that sad? In our world relationships don't last to the end of life like they should. And even when marriages do stay together, too often the love has died long ago.

Today I want to ask you how's your love? How's your love for God? Is your love for God strong and alive, or has it faded? Cooled? I want to ask you to rate yourself on

THE FIRST-LOVE FACTOR. << Assess the condition of your heart.

John begins by reminding us how precious the church is to God. John begins by saying: **"These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands."** The 7 stars means: churches. God doesn't hold the nations in His hands. God doesn't hold Microsoft or Tesla, in His hands. God doesn't hold movie studios or networks in His hands. !!God holds the Church! Our church. Every church. For you, we, the Church is the HOPE of the world! Do you get the idea that God cares deeply for you – that He loves you?

Jesus praises this church for their service. He says, **"I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance."** Here at St. Paul, for generations past people have given their hard work. These days, many of you serve. You show up when maybe you could think of a million other things you need to do. You use the abilities and the personality God gave you to serve Him. So, a word of appreciation to you. The church needs everyone to serve – not because GOD needs the help, but because each of US need to serve. Serving is good for US. It helps our hearts grow. We serve God out of love, out of thankfulness for all our Father has, and continues, and will give to us. When you love someone, you serve them, and it helps your relationship grow. And when you engage your heart in actions that express love and gratitude to God, YOU GROW, you BENEFIT.

Now, there are many people who profess the name of Christ, they become members of His church, they have said Jesus is the Lord (the Master) of their lives, yet they refuse to give and serve and work. They live as spiritual consumers. Frankly, I don't understand that.

If the Church is the one thing that Christ holds in His hand, -- if the Church - God's people -- is God's only plan to bring forgiveness and the hope of heaven to people who will have no hope without Him, then why would you not serve and give to that which Christ holds in His hand? Why would you say to Christ: "I'll take your sacrifice to get into heaven, but I will not sacrifice my time or my energy or my money for the hope of world?" To be devoted to Christ and His Church means toil and labor and hard work. And Christ praises this.

Now, sometimes people serve, but they don't love Him. They work, but out of obligation. They give, but they grumble about it. They don't really do it out of love.

That seems to be what's going on in the Church in Ephesus. Jesus says: ***"I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love."***

I want to ask if this describes you. You put in lots of hours. You've learned lots of stuff about the Bible, but something in your heart has died. And where there was once tenderness, and love -- there's a kind of hardness or coldness about you.



When I was growing up, a comic strip in the newspaper was called, "The Lockhorns." Leroy and Loretta Lockhorn were a married couple that had fallen out of love a long time ago.

How about you and your relationship with God? How are you doing in the First Love factor? Rate yourself. Are you on the negative side or the positive side? Do you cherish and nurture your love for God so it stays strong and vital? Do you listen to Him? Give to Him? Do you take time to reflect on how deep and rich and lasting is His love to you?

Sometimes we just try to skim Christianity. We just try to skim God -- get as little of Him in as we have to. But that's not how God's loved you! He's never skimmed or scrimped. He's given His ALL. Everyday He continues to give His best. Each breath, each moment is a gift from God. He gives food and home, and people we love. If that weren't enough, there's more -- much more! We've sinned and we

turn from God everyday, and so God gave His best – Jesus- to live perfectly, sinlessly -- and die – the Innocent One died for the guilty, for sinful people like you, in order to give you His innocence, His forgiveness, His love, and purpose, and heaven to come. God loves you with His BEST.

So how about it? How's your love for God? Still alive and on fire? Or, has following Jesus become more about things you do, than a relationship with a real God who loves you? Just a real honest assessment now.

Friends, I'll tell you this: **we must not become a church of busy people with full schedules ... and empty hearts.** Jesus said: ***"Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."*** Remember, He says. Remember His love for you. Remember what is most basic – Jesus loves me this I know.

And repent – return to what you did at first. Unhurried times of prayer. Sincere confession of sin. Reflection on the magnitude of God's love and forgiveness for you. Open hearted reading of Scripture. Freely offered acts of service. Are you a minus or plus on this one – the FIRST LOVE FACTOR. If it's a minus, will you ask God to forgive, and to turn it into a plus.

Now, when there is love of God and others, the other 2 factors we're going to look at flow out of a heart of love for God. And the next factor is **THE FEAR FACTOR.** <<

Fear is powerful. Fear can change behavior.

What keeps you from sticking your finger in a light socket? Fear of a shock. What keeps you from putting your hand on a hot stove? Fear of being burned. Fear is powerful and it changes our behavior.

It seems that fear was taking over among the Christ followers in Smyrna. Look at verse 9: ***"I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."***

The people there were suffering greatly. When He talks about the synagogue of Satan most likely it is religious persecution from Jewish people who turned public opinion against the Christians.

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Jesus praises these people for being faithful through so much. You've kept your first love even under tough circumstances. Now just don't give up. **"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life,"** Jesus says.

How would you rate yourself on the FEAR FACTOR? Are you on the plus or the minus side of this one?

Again, if you're on the minus side, !! ask God to turn it around. Don't give up! Keep hoping! You hold on! You endure with patience and grace because there's a crown waiting for you. Focus on His love for you first and love Him back – and let that love remove the fear factor so that you live 100% for Him.

The 3rd factor we're looking at today is **THE COMFORT FACTOR.** << When you love Christ first and foremost, don't let *FEAR* stop you ... and don't let *COMFORT* stop you.

To the Church in Pergamum Christ said:

“Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitians. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.” Revelation 2:14-16

The Christ-followers in Pergamum were facing very serious temptation. The temptation was to sell out their faith in order to live a more comfortable and prosperous life. He mentions here the teachings of Balaam. Balaam was an Old Testament prophet who sold out. Balaam took a big bribe to proclaim what people wanted instead of what God wanted. And Balaam got paid off for leading the People of Israel away from worshipping only the true God.

The references to food sacrifice by idols and sexual immorality is another example of the same sin. It's called here the teaching of the Nicolaitians. This is a group that believed they could follow Jesus and still keep worshipping false idols and engaging in sexual immorality.

Back in the days when John wrote this, the backbone of society in the 1st century were Guilds. A guild was like a union. There were guilds for tent makers, silver workers, and every other kind of job.

Now, each guild, had a patron god, an idol, that they would worship. And their meetings were idol worshipping feasts, where the whole community would gather to give sacrifices to Hermes, and Zeus, and the emperor, and a hundred of other gods. And these feasts would turn into drunken orgies. Now, most the business deals were done there. If you wanted to make a good living in those days, you participated in these idol worshipping drunken orgies.

When people came to faith in Christ, they weren't going to worship false idols, and they weren't going to participate in the guild orgies. But Christ-followers who loved money and the good life did it anyway. They compromised their faith in Jesus. That's the COMFORT FACTOR. They did it to keep a paycheck.

For us today, the biggest challenge to being and living as a Christ-follower in North America today is materialism. It's easy to

let our money, things, homes, cars, boats, campers, and lot of other stuff be the focus of our attention and draw our hearts away from loving God.

THE COMFORT FACTOR is when we seek pleasure more than God. Again, a real honest assessment on this one – are you on the plus or the minus side? If you're on the minus side, will you give it up, and ask God to work in you to turn this around?

Friends, I want to remind you that God's love for you has never faded or cooled. If anything He loves you more than ever before. You are His first love.

To those churches long ago, and to us today, He gives these wonderful promises that are pure love and grace. Jesus said: **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."** Rev.2:7 This is a clear reference to heaven.

At the beginning of time in the Garden of Eden it was a paradise with God. There was this tree there, we are told, called the tree of life. But when people sinned and turned away from God, the paradise with God was lost, and people died – they no longer lived forever – and they were removed from the tree of life.

The day is coming, Jesus says, when you will be with God. And there will be no more death. You will live forever in heaven. That's God's gift to you.

Jesus also promises: **"... He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death."** Rev.2nd11 In chapter 20 we find out that the 2nd death is hell. In other words, God promises you won't go to hell, you'll be saved.

In verse 17, Jesus promises you: **"... I will give some of the hidden manna."** Rev.2:17 Manna was the food that God gave the People of Israel for 40 years in the desert. Everyday He fed them. And every day He will take care of you. He will give you all you need for this life.

Then Jesus promises: **"I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."** Rev.2:17 Juries in that day were given white and black pebbles, and they would vote for innocence or guilt by placing one or the other in a jar. The white stone meant a vote for innocence. The black stone was a vote for guilty. That's where we get the expression "black-balling" someone – giving them a bad name, saying they are guilty of something. Jesus

promises you a white stone. That you are innocent before Him. Your sins are forgiven because Jesus gave His life on the cross to pay for all your wrongs. He looks at you and sees white – purity, forgiveness – these are gifts of His love to you.

“A New name, known only to you.” And, you receive a new name. Names are powerful things. Maybe some has labeled you or done something to you – hurt you deeply – and you’ve internalized that. You see yourself as worthless, or dirty, or insignificant.

Jesus promises you a new name. It’s a name that will reflect His intimate love for you. A Name that will give you a new beginning. A name that will reflect the full potential that He created in you. A name that will remind you that you are victorious because of what Christ Jesus has won for you.

Friends, Jesus loves you with His undiminished love! <<

In response to His great love for you, give Him your first love! -- A love that never fades, never gives up. A love that you nurture so that it stays strong and vital. **Let us be people of first love!**

And let’s be that kind of a people! Let this church be known as that group of people who love to listen to God; people who take time -- in all the busyness life -- to reflect on how deep and rich and lasting is His love to us. A people of unhurried times of prayer. Sincere confessions of sin. A people of Open hearted reading of Scripture. Freely offered acts of service. Let St. Paul Lutheran Church – that’s YOU – ALL of us, -- be the people who hold firmly to their first love – to God – who has and continues and always will give His love in HUGE and AMAZING doses.

Amen.

Sunday, May 15, 2022

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And let's be that kind of a people! Let this church be known as that group of people who love to listen to God; people who take time -- in all the busyness life -- to reflect on how deep and rich and lasting is His love to us. A people of unhurried times of prayer. Sincere confessions of sin. A people of Open hearted reading of Scripture. Freely offered acts of service. Let St. Paul Lutheran Church – that's YOU – ALL of us, -- be the people who hold firmly to their first love – to God – who has and continues and always will give His love in HUGE and AMAZING doses.

Amen.

Revelation

SERMON SERIES, CHAPTER 2

“Staying In Love”

Several children were asked their opinions about love and dating. Here's what they said:

WHAT IS FALLING IN LOVE LIKE? Roger, age 9, said: What's falling in love like? “Like an avalanche where you have to run for your life.”

Regina, age 10, said: “I'm not rushing into being in love. I'm finding 4th grade hard enough.”

Alonzo, age 9, was asked how to make someone fall in love with you. He said: “Don't do things like have smelly green sneakers. You might get attention, but attention ain't the same thing as love.”

And, WHEN IS IT OKAY TO KISS SOMEONE? Allan, age 10, said, “You should never kiss a girl unless you have enough bucks to buy her a ring and her own DVD player, 'cause she'll want to have videos of the wedding.”

Children's insights on love and marriage are wonderful, aren't they?

We're in a sermon series on the Bible book of Revelation. This is without a doubt the most challenging and the most misunderstood book in the Bible. Today we're in chapter 2 and Jesus turns His attention to us – to His Church. He wants to get His people ready for what lies ahead in the future. He examines 7 churches in Asia Minor, what is now the country of Turkey.

The situations of these 7 churches apply to all believers of all time – even to us. And each of these letters has a format. Each begins with

- ♦ a Description of Christ in His Power and Glory, ♦ then He commends each Church on what they're doing well. ♦ Next Jesus issues a Call to Repentance and Change (He tells them what needs fixing). ♦ And finally, He ends with a Promise of God's Blessing.

Today as we look at 3 of the letters to these churches, we're going to do this as kind of a test. You're going to do some evaluation of yourself.

There's a story told of a husband who went with his wife to her 35th high school reunion. While the woman was reminiscing with some of her old friends, a man approached the husband and admitted, "Years ago I was madly in love with your wife." The husband said, "So was I."

Isn't that sad? In our world relationships don't last to the end of life like they should. And even when marriages do stay together, too often the love has died long ago.

Today I want to ask you how's your love? How's your love for God? Is your love for God strong and alive, or has it faded? Cooled? I want to ask you to rate yourself on

THE FIRST-LOVE FACTOR. Assess the condition of your heart.

John wrote in Revelation, chapter 2: ***"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: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.***

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! 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." Rev.2:4-5

John begins by reminding us how precious the church is to God. John begins by saying: ***"These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands."*** The 7 stars means: churches. God doesn't hold the nations in His hands. God doesn't hold Microsoft or Tesla, in His hands. God doesn't hold movie studios or networks in His hands. !!God holds the Church! Our church. Every church. The Church is the HOPE of the world! Do you get the idea that God cares deeply for you – that He loves you?

Jesus praises this church for their service. He says, ***"I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance."*** Here at St. Paul, for

generations past people have given their hard work. These days, many of you serve. You show up when maybe you could think of a million other things you need to do. You use the abilities and the personality God gave you to serve Him. So, a word of appreciation to you. The church needs everyone to serve – not because GOD needs the help, but because each of US need to serve. Serving is good for US. It helps our hearts grow. We serve God out of love, out of thankfulness for all our Father has, and continues, and will give to us. When you love someone, you serve them, and it helps your relationship grow. And when you engage your heart in actions that express love and gratitude to God, YOU GROW, you BENEFIT.

Now, there are many people who profess the name of Christ, they become members of His church, they have said Jesus is the Lord (the Master) of their lives, yet they refuse to give and serve and work. They live as spiritual consumers. Frankly, I don't understand that.

If the Church is the one thing that Christ holds in His hand, -- if the Church - God's people – is God's only plan to bring forgiveness and the hope of heaven to people who will have no hope without Him, then why would you not serve and give to that which Christ holds in His hand? Why would you say to Christ: "I'll take your sacrifice to get into heaven, but I will not sacrifice my time or my energy or my money for the hope of world?" To be devoted to Christ and His Church means toil and labor and hard work. And Christ praises this.

Now, sometimes people serve, but they don't love Him. They work, but out of obligation. They give, but they grumble about it. They don't really do it out of love.

That seems to be what's going on in the Church in Ephesus. Jesus says: *"I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love."*

I want to ask if this describes you. You put in lots of hours. You've learned lots of stuff about the Bible, but something in your heart has died. And where there was once tenderness, and love – there's a kind of hardness or coldness about you.



When I was growing up, a comic strip in the newspaper was called, “The Lockhorns.” Leroy and Loretta Lockhorn were a married couple that had fallen out of love a long time ago.

How about you and your relationship with God? How are you doing in the First Love factor? Rate yourself. Are you on the negative side or the positive side? Do you cherish and nurture your love for God so it stays strong and vital? Do you listen to Him? Give to Him? Do you take time to reflect on how deep and rich and lasting is His love to you?

Sometimes we just try to skim Christianity. We just try to skim God – get as little of Him in as we have to. But that’s not how God’s loved you! He’s never skimmed or scrimped. He’s given His ALL. Everyday He continues to give His best. Each breath, each moment is a gift from God. He gives food and home, and people we love. If that weren’t enough, there’s more – much more! We’ve sinned and we turn from God everyday, and so God gave His best – Jesus- to live perfectly, sinlessly -- and die – the Innocent One died for the guilty, for sinful people like you, in order to give you His innocence, His forgiveness, His love, and purpose, and heaven to come. God loves you with His BEST.

So how about it? How’s your love for God? Still alive and on fire? Or, has following Jesus become more about things you do, than a relationship with a real God who loves you? Just a real honest assessment now.

Friends, I’ll tell you this: **we must not become a church of busy people with full schedules ... and empty hearts.** Jesus said: *“Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did*

at first.” Remember, He says. Remember His love for you. Remember what is most basic – Jesus loves me this I know.

And repent – return to what you did at first. Unhurried times of prayer. Sincere confession of sin. Reflection on the magnitude of God’s love and forgiveness for you. Open hearted reading of Scripture. Freely offered acts of service. Are you a minus or plus on this one – the **FIRST LOVE FACTOR**. If it’s a minus, will you ask God to forgive, and to turn it into a plus.

Now, when there is love of God and others, the other 2 factors we’re going to look at flow out of a heart of love for God. And the next factor is **THE FEAR FACTOR**.

Fear is powerful. Fear can change behavior.

What keeps you from sticking your finger in a light socket? Fear of a shock. What keeps you from putting your hand on a hot stove? Fear of being burned. Fear is powerful and it changes our behavior.

It seems that fear was taking over among the Christ followers in Smyrna. Look at verse 9: *“I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

The people there were suffering greatly. When He talks about the synagogue of Satan most likely it is religious persecution from Jewish people who turned public opinion against the Christians.

Back then Christians really stood out as different – and they suffered for it! Some were thrown to lions to be eaten, some were burned at the stake, sometimes they were covered in the skins of animals and thrown to wild dogs, sometimes they were covered in tar and lit as human torches to illuminate walkways. There are records of mothers being crucified with their babies dangling around their necks.

When believers suffer, they *CAN* be brave, but often they become fearful. Some give up their faith in Jesus. Many just hold back. They don’t speak or live as a Christian. They try to keep it a secret that Jesus means everything to them.

How about you? Do you ever hold back in living for or speaking about Jesus because you're afraid people might look at you differently or think about you differently?

Jesus gives a promise. He says you will suffer persecution for 10 days. 10 days. Numbers in Revelation are usually not literal, but symbolic. Ten is the number for completeness. In other words, "your suffering will go on until it's complete. God won't let it go on and on and on without end. God knows. God sees. There is an end in sight ... and the end is not too far away." Just a week & a half. Ten days. Don't give up. Keep trusting Jesus. Keep serving. Remain faithful.

Jesus praises these people for being faithful through so much. You've kept your first love even under tough circumstances. Now just don't give up. *"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life,"* Jesus says.

How would you rate yourself on the FEAR FACTOR? Are you on the plus or the minus side of this one?

Again, if you're on the minus side, !! ask God to turn it around. Don't give up! Keep hoping! You hold on! You endure with patience and grace because there's a crown waiting for you. Focus on His love for you first and love Him back – and let that love remove the fear factor so that you live 100% for Him.

The 3rd factor we're looking at today is **THE COMFORT FACTOR**. When you love Christ first and foremost, don't let *FEAR* stop you ... and don't let *COMFORT* stop you.

To the Church in Pergamum Christ said:

"Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitians. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Revelation 2:14-16

The Christ-followers in Pergamum were facing very serious temptation. The temptation was to sell out their faith in order to live a more comfortable and prosperous life. He mentions here the teachings of Balaam. Balaam was an Old Testament prophet who sold out. Balaam took a big bribe to proclaim what people wanted instead of what God wanted. And Balaam got paid off for leading the People of Israel away from worshipping only the true God.

The references to food sacrifice by idols and sexual immorality is another example of the same sin. It's called here the teaching of the Nicolaitians. This is a group that believed they could follow Jesus and still keep worshipping false idols and engaging in sexual immorality.

Back in the days when John wrote this, the backbone of society in the 1st century were Guilds. A guild was like a union. There were guilds for tent makers, silver workers, and every other kind of job.

Now, each guild, had a patron god, an idol, that they would worship. And their meetings were idol worshipping feasts, where the whole community would gather to give sacrifices to Hermes, and Zeus, and the emperor, and a hundred of other gods. And these feasts would turn into drunken orgies. Now, most the business deals were done there. If you wanted to make a good living in those days, you participated in these idol worshipping drunken orgies.

When people came to faith in Christ, they weren't going to worship false idols, and they weren't going to participate in the guild orgies. But Christ-followers who loved money and the good life did it anyway. They compromised their faith in Jesus. That's the COMFORT FACTOR. They did it to keep a paycheck.

For us today, the biggest challenge to being and living as a Christ-follower in North America today is materialism. It's easy to let our money, things, homes, cars, boats, campers, and lot of other stuff be the focus of our attention and draw our hearts away from loving God.

THE COMFORT FACTOR is when we seek pleasure more than God. Again, a real honest assessment on this one – are you on the plus or the minus side? If you're on the minus side, will you give it up, and ask God to work in you to turn this around?

Friends, I want to remind you that God's love for you has never faded or cooled. If anything, He loves you more than ever before. You are His first love.

To those churches long ago, and to us today, He gives these wonderful promises that are pure love and grace. Jesus said: ***"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."*** Rev.2:7 This is a clear reference to heaven.

At the beginning of time in the Garden of Eden it was a paradise with God. There was this tree there, we are told, called the tree of life. But when people sinned and turned away from God, the paradise with God was lost, and people died – they no longer lived forever – and they were removed from the tree of life.

The day is coming, Jesus says, when you will be with God. And there will be no more death. You will live forever in heaven. That's God's gift to you.

Jesus also promises: *"... He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death."* Rev.2:11 In chapter 20 we find out that the 2nd death is hell. In other words, God promises you won't go to hell, you'll be saved.

In verse 17, Jesus promises you: *"... I will give some of the hidden manna."* Rev.2:17 Manna was the food that God gave the People of Israel for 40 years in the desert. Every day He fed them. And every day He will take care of you. He will give you all you need for this life.

Then Jesus promises: *"I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."* Rev.2:17 Juries in that day were given white and black pebbles, and they would vote for innocence or guilt by placing one or the other in a jar. The white stone meant a vote for innocence. The black stone was a vote for guilty. That's where we get the expression "black-balling" someone – giving them a bad name, saying they are guilty of something. Jesus promises you a white stone. That you are innocent before Him. Your sins are forgiven because Jesus gave His life on the cross to pay for all your wrongs. He looks at you and sees white – purity, forgiveness – these are gifts of His love to you.

"A New name, known only to you." And you receive a new name. Names are powerful things. Maybe some has labeled you or done something to you – hurt you deeply – and you've internalized that. You see yourself as worthless, or dirty, or insignificant.

Jesus promises you a new name. It's a name that will reflect His intimate love for you. A Name that will give you a new beginning. A name that will reflect the full potential that He created in you. A name that will remind you that you are victorious because of what Christ Jesus has won for you.

Friends, Jesus loves you with His undiminished love!

In response to His great love for you, give Him your first love! -- A love that never fades, never gives up. A love that you nurture so that it stays strong and vital. **Let us be people of first love!**

And let's be that kind of a people! Let this church be known as that group of people who love to listen to God; people who take time -- in all the busyness life -- to reflect on how deep and rich and lasting is His love to us. A people of unhurried times of prayer. Sincere confessions of sin. A people of Open-hearted reading of Scripture. Freely offered acts of service. Let St. Paul Lutheran Church -- that's YOU -- ALL of us, -- be the people who hold firmly to their first love -- to God -- who has and continues and always will give His love in HUGE and AMAZING doses.

Amen.

MESSAGE NOTES**New Slide****Staying In Love****New Slide**

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Roger, age 9

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Regina, age 10

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New Slide**Staying In Love****New Slide**

PURIFYING THE SEVEN CHURCHES:

Preparation for receiving the Message of what is to come.

1. Description of Christ in Power and Glory.
2. Commendation of each Church.
3. Call to Repentance and Change.
4. Promise of God's Blessing.

New Slide**THE FIRST LOVE FACTOR****New Slide**

"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: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! 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." Revelation 2:1-5

New Slide

"These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands."

New Slide

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

New Slide

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New Slide

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New Slide

We must not become a church of busy people with full schedules ... and empty hearts.

"Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."

New Slide

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"I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:8-10

New Slide

"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."

New Slide

THE COMFORT FACTOR

"Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Revelation 2:14-16

New Slide

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." Revelation 2:7

New Slide

"... He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." Revelation 2:11

New Slide

"... I will give some of the hidden manna." Revelation 2:17

New Slide

"I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it." Revelation 2:17

New Slide

Let us be people of first love!

Teaching series: the Book of **R e v e l a t i o n**

Staying In Love

Revelation 2: 1-17

THE _____ FACTOR

Negative +-----+-----+ Positive

"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: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! 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." Revelation 2:1-5

NOTE: St. Paul had founded the church in Ephesus, and St. John had lived there for 25 years. Ephesus was one of the foremost cities in the Roman world with impressive civic monuments. The church in Ephesus was founded in 55 and was 40 years old when John wrote Revelation. Its location in the capital of the province gave it high standing almost from the start.

THE _____ FACTOR

Negative +-----+-----+ Positive

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:8-10

NOTE: Smyrna was a proud and beautiful Asian city closely aligned with Rome and eager to meet its demands for emperor worship. This plus a large and hostile Jewish population made it extremely difficult to live there as a Christian.

THE _____ FACTOR

Negative +-----+-----+ Positive

"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live--where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives.

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Revelation 2:12-16

NOTE: Pergamum was the ancient capital of Asia, built on a cone-shaped hill rising 1,000 feet above the surrounding valley. Its name in Greek means "citadel."

God's Promise To You

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." Revelation 2:7

"... He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." Revelation 2:11

"... I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it." Revelation 2:17

Let us be people of _____ !