

JJ

7th Sunday a. Trinity
July 18, 2010
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

Text: Revelation 3:7-13 *"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: 8 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 'Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie-- I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. 10 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. 13 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'* (NASB)

Theme: ANNIVERSARY LETTERS FROM JESUS
"Hang On! I'm On the Way!"

Dear fellow redeemed in Jesus Christ, who alone is the Way, the True, and the Life,

Some of you may remember a television program that aired in from 1989 to 1996 on CBS entitled, "Rescue 911." This program re-enacted real 911 calls that were placed. Stories were told of the work done by police, fire, rescue, or ambulance personnel responding to various emergency situations. Whatever the situation, be it a heart attack, a fire, or a burglary, the 911 operator would try his or her best to calm the panicked caller by telling him to, "Hang on! Help is on the way!" Soon the caller would hear the welcome sound of sirens drawing closer, assuring him or her that help was indeed very close.

But it is interesting, isn't it, that a police siren can mean two different things to two different people in the same situation. To the person whose house has been broken into, the police siren means help has arrived to assist in this terrifying situation. However to the burglar in that same house, the sound of a police siren is terrifying. To the burglar it means that he is in trouble and about to pay for his crime. Though both people are in the same situation, the police siren means help for one and harm for the other.

Jesus' promise to return and judge the living and the dead can kind of be viewed the same way, can't it? For the believer in Christ, we cannot wait to hear the sound of the trumpet and see the return of our Savior and King. But for those who reject Christ as their Savior, that trumpet will be a most dreaded sound. Here in chapter 3 of Revelation we find Jesus speaking of His return in two different ways. Last Sunday, as we considered the letter of Jesus to the dead church in Sardis, we heard Jesus say, *"Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a*

thief.” (Rev 3:3) Jesus was calling on that congregation to repent before it was too late or His return on the Last Day would be a terrifying event.

But today, in our sixth letter to the congregation in Philadelphia, we hear of Jesus speaking of His return in this way, **“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”** Jesus is, in essence, saying, “Hang on! I’m on the way!” These were words of comfort for the Christians in Philadelphia in the midst of their struggles and trials. As we mark the 50th anniversary of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, let us consider these comforting words of Jesus amidst the struggles and trials we face now and in the years to come. Jesus says to us, “Hang on! I’m on the way!” May God the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen us by His holy word that we may remain alert and steadfast until the end.

The city of Philadelphia has a turbulent history. Located on the edge of a volcanic plain, it was subject to frequent earthquake. In the year 17 A.D., when Jesus would have been about 20 years old, an earthquake destroyed much of the city. But the city of Philadelphia has survived until modern day, though today known as “Alasehir,” Turkey. Though Muslim hordes attacked the city throughout Medieval times, the city remained a free, Greek, Christian city until the mid-14th century. And even to this day, churches bearing the name of Christ still exist in this ancient city.

As for the congregation in Philadelphia, we are left with the impression that this was a small congregation as Jesus says of them, **“You have a little power.”** They certainly were not the most powerful church on the block. Each of the pagan temples in Philadelphia as well as the Jewish synagogue probably had more members than this Christian church. And we know as a church body with a little power and a congregation with but a little power, it is easy to become discouraged and disheartened. We feel we are so small and the opposition is so great, what can we do?

More than just feeling little, the congregation in Philadelphia seemed to be facing opposition from members of the Jewish synagogue. Think of it, here you are, a member of the first Christian church in your city. Your Lord and Savior was not a Gentile like you, but was born of a Jewish mother and worshiped in the Jewish temple. His claim is that He is the fulfillment of all the promises made to Jewish ancestors in the Jewish Old Testament Bible. And yet in your own city there were many Jews who rejected the Son of David as their Messiah, but you a Gentile were worshiping Him as your God and Savior.

Jesus assures the Christians in Philadelphia that they are not true Jews. That is, they may have been physical descendants of Abraham, but they were not spiritual descendants of Abraham. Jesus told them, **“Those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie.”** Do not be dismayed by the unbelief of the Jews. They are not followers of the LORD God. They are liars and of the father of lies, Satan himself. True descendants of Abraham are those of the promise. Just as Ishmael was a physical descendant of Abraham, but it was by Isaac - the son of the promise - through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed. All who believe in the promised Savior Jesus are true Jews in God’s eyes.

Still there was much adversity that this small group was facing. They lived in a pagan city and faced Jewish opposition. What could they do? They had remained faithful to Jesus thus far, but no doubt they worried. Jesus encourages them by telling them to hold on, because He is on the way! **“Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who**

dwell on the earth.” A time of great testing was about to come upon the earth. One of the tests, was the rise of the Antichrist in Rome. This would test those who dwell on earth. Would they follow the decrees of the Pope, or would they follow the Word of God? Jesus promises that through the power of His word He would guard the Philadelphians from the hour of testing. And indeed, the church in Philadelphia broke from the Roman Catholic Church and was a part of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

But was is the overriding message to this congregation with a little power? ***“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”*** Jesus comforts them by assuring them that He is there to protect them and that He will soon come to deliver them from their troubles. He exhorts them to hold on to the Gospel, hold onto the faith, and don’t let anyone take the crown of eternal life which Jesus has given them by grace. *“Hold on! I’m on the way!”*

We too seem like such a small voice in the world, don’t we. A congregation of some 40 souls. We belong to a church body that, by the grace of God, is celebrating it’s 50th Anniversary. But the CLC has only about 8,000 members. We regularly run budget deficits. Like our ancient brethren in Philadelphia, we have “a little power.” And like them we struggle with various trials and tribulations. Other Christian churches try to convince us that we are behind the times, no progressive enough, and that our confession on church fellowship is unloving and holding us back.

Our little church body also worries about our youth. From junior-high on up, in so-called “science classes” they are taught that there is no Almighty God who created them but instead, a mystical and magical theory of evolution is taught as science and not truth. Something that is not scientific at all, for it was not observed and cannot be reproduced. Topics that used to make grown-ups blush, are being taught to our grade school children and called “sex education.” Our young people are taught from early on that there is no moral right or wrong, but we are to be open and accepting of all so-called, “life-style choices.” And at our universities, many professors openly mock and ridicule the Christian faith. It is no wonder that we are losing our young people. A great testing is going on in our world as our children are being taught one thing for two hours on Sunday and something totally different Monday through Friday.

What hope does our little church body or our little congregation against the numerous and loud voices of this world? Though we may have a little power, we do have ***“He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.”*** In Isaiah 22 we heard how God gave great power and authority to Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah. Though not as powerful as King Hezekiah, Eliakim could control the entrance to the palace and thus the presence of the king. If Eliakim opened the door to the king, no one was allowed to close it. If Eliakim denied access to the king, no one could open it.

This was ultimately a picture of Jesus who has the key of David. Jesus has opened a door to us that no one can close. Jesus has opened to us the door to paradise. No one can undo what Jesus did. When He who is true said, ***“It is finished,”*** He meant it. Ever last sin of every last sinner was paid for. No one can undo it what Jesus has done. When Jesus rose from the dead on Easter, the stone was rolled away, and no one could seal it shut again. Death’s eternal stinger has been removed forever. Jesus conquered sin and death forever. He has the key of David. In Jesus not even the gates of hell can prevail against us!

Now there will be trials and tests that we will face throughout our life. Our Father allows

them to come into our lives because He loves us. But we have Jesus. Jesus who is returning soon to deliver us from this world of tears and terrors, sadness and sorrow to be a permanent fixture with Himself in heaven. And this is His promise, ***“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.”***

Unlike their homes in Philadelphia, where they had to run out of their homes when the earth began to shake, Jesus promises that in heaven we will be stable fixtures - pillars - in the temple of God. And our identification tags will tell our family affiliation, our home country, and who we belong to. That we are children of the heavenly Father, that the New Jerusalem of heaven is our home, and that we belong to Jesus. This is the promise of grace which Jesus holds out to all who overcome.

What a comfort the sound of a police, fire, or ambulance siren is to those who are in need of help. Even more so, what a comfort the sound of the Gospel is to the suffering sinner's ear. We hear that blessed truth that ever last one of our sins have been paid for. We hear that by rising from the dead Jesus has opened the door to paradise for all that believe in Him. And through this Gospel message, though we have but a little power, we have the keys to the kingdom of heaven. We have Jesus. And we are assured that our Savior is coming soon. May God give us the strength to hold fast to what we have, as our ears eagerly wait for the trumpet to sound. “Hang on!” Jesus says, “I’m on the way!” Amen.