



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

March 2, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

Ash Wednesday

First Lesson: [Genesis 3:21-23](#)

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Revelation 2:1-7](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 15:9-17](#)

### **Ephesus: Love Lost, Death Found**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation. Amen.

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

This year during our Midweek Lenten Services we are going to follow a practice that Luther had in Wittenberg way back when. He would use the Midweek Services during Lent to review various parts of the Catechism. We've done it in the past. We've done Baptism. We've done the Lord's Supper. I believe we've done the Keys. This year we are narrowing in a very, very narrow focus on part of the Third Article where we talk about the Holy Christian Church. We are going to focus on what God looks for in the visible church, the local congregation, a part of the Holy Christian Church and what He wants from His people. So we are already starting it on Ash Wednesday and it will continue through Maundy Thursday because we're going to look at the seven letters to the seven churches in [Revelation 2 and 3](#). During the weeks you might want to read through all those letters over and over again and see what God looks for because you're a part of His Holy Christian Church if you're a believer, and you're a part of a local congregation. So what does God want?

These letters that were written, He told John to write them and then give them to the angel of the church. Jesus identifies Himself as He who holds the seven angels in His hands and walks among the seven lampstands. Before this (in [Chapter 1](#)) He talked about the seven angels. Angel is a word that means "messenger," and the seven lampstands are the seven churches that He is writing to, churches in Asia Minor. He starts in Ephesus, which was the largest, and the capital or the center of that area at that time. He kind of goes clockwise around all the different churches. These are real churches that were really there in time. The angel He was writing to is the pastor that was serving those churches. The lampstands are the churches themselves because as Christians, we are to let our light shine as we live for Jesus because the light of the

Gospel is only going to come through God's people, the churches. Even though these are historical churches that had things that were going on in their church, when Jesus writes to them, He tells us a lot about what He wants from His churches. He commends them for things, except for a couple of them, and He warns them about things, except for very few. Then He exhorts them to do things that promise His blessing. We see that pattern already here in the letter to the church of Ephesus.

He identifies first Himself, who is saying this. ***These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.*** In the first chapter He had been revealed as one with blazing eyes. It speaks to Jesus as being all-knowing. So He says ***I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, 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.*** He talks about some of the good things they were doing.

Ephesus was a church that had a fascinating history when you read about it in the [Book of Acts](#). When Paul went there, he spent three years there. In the time that he was there, the church grew, and it grew, and it grew. It was one of the larger churches in that area of the world. People were turned from worshipping false gods to serving the true Lord. They had the temple to Artemis there, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The church in Ephesus had grown to such a point that people weren't going there as much anymore. The silversmiths who made the little statues of Artemis were upset and they started a riot because they were so mad that Paul was leading people to Jesus and away from these false gods. In fact, we are told in the [Book of Acts](#) that sorcerers turned from their sorcery and turned to Jesus as the only Savior of the world. We are told they brought their sorcery scrolls, put them in a pile and burned them. They estimated the value of those scrolls at 50,000 drachmas. That doesn't sound like anything, right? We don't know what in the world a drachma is, right? Think about this—a drachma was a day's wage. Fifty thousand days' wages went up in smoke because they turned from worshipping false gods to the Triune God and to Jesus as Savior. It was a church that Paul says was well known for its love and that it was a light and a beacon. Paul served there. Then later Apollos served there. Then another man served there. Tradition tells us that John, himself, the apostle John, who was writing this letter, served them after a time. That's not told to us in Scripture but that's what tradition says.

But as John is writing this from the Island of Patmos in exile, evidently some things had changed. They were still doing the right things. They were doing what God would want them to do. They took a stand against the Nicolaitans, which seem to be the things that they were mentioning in what I just read to you; the false teachers that seemed to encourage "God will forgive you, so live however you want because you're forgiven anyhow." That's kind of like today when we say to ourselves "It's easier to ask for

forgiveness than permission” and we do whatever we want even though we know that God thinks it’s wrong. They took their stand against that and said “That’s not right. That’s wrong.” They took their stand against wicked people that were teaching things that were against God’s Word. So outwardly they looked like they looked at the time of Paul many, many years earlier (60 years earlier).

But Jesus not only knows their deeds, He knows why they are doing their deeds. He knows the hearts, the motivation; the things that you and I can’t see in others’ hearts. Even when we’re doing the right things, are we doing it for the right reason—out of love for Jesus? Jesus can see that and here is what He says. He says “I’m paying attention to that.” He says, ***“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.”*** They were so busy doing that they forgot about why you do it. It’s because of this love for the Savior that causes you to do the right thing. It’s love for Jesus, who gave His life for you. That seems like it had become “Yes, we know that, but look at all the stuff we do.” It seems as though a love that’s lost, the love of Jesus that is lost, most often is replaced by a love for self. The focus is on what they were doing but not the why.

Jesus has some pretty strong words for them, doesn’t He? ***“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.”*** They would cease to be the people of God there in Ephesus. Unfortunately, that did happen. The city of Ephesus no longer exists. There is no Christian congregation that gathers in that place. The lampstand is gone. The light of the Gospel has grown very dim in that part of the world. It’s modern-day Turkey.

When love for Christ is gone and we’re just going through the motions and doing the things that we know we’re supposed to do but we forget why we do them, we are in danger. That’s why our God calls us to repent. He doesn’t want a day like Ash Wednesday just to be something where we go through the motions, where we outwardly make the sign of the cross with ashes on a banner and yet don’t let it affect our hearts and focus on this incredible love that our Savior has for us and see that it’s our sins, not someone else’s sins, not the sins of those who aren’t here or those who are never here, or those who don’t love Jesus. It’s MY sins that killed Jesus. That’s what this day is to be about for each and every Christian.

I can’t repent for you and you can’t repent for me. But this day our God calls each of us to repent, which means turning away from the things that God says are sin; which means we have to know what God says. It also involves not only turning away but turning to. What you and I turn to is not our efforts, not our good intentions, not our desire to do better. What we turn to is a Savior who loved us so much that He left heaven and was perfect in our place and died in our place. He did it all!

This is what moved the Ephesians to burn the scrolls. This is what moved them to share Jesus with the people in their area. This is what caused their congregation to grow and thrive because they were focused on who Jesus was and how He was the ONLY answer to sin. But whenever eyes are taken off of Jesus, we're all in danger.

Today we can do the right things all the time but God is saying to us, pleading with us, do it out of love for Jesus. Make the time to worship, not just so you can eat with your child at a soup supper but because your eyes are on Jesus and you love Jesus. Make time to be there and worship and encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ so that the lampstand remains and so that we are the light Christ wants us to be here in this community, not just because your kids are singing in church but because you love Jesus.

You and I fail all the time at doing things because we love Jesus. We can become self-centered and if we become too inward looking, we can be in danger of having our lampstand removed. So today and in these 40 days of Lent, let's hear His call to repentance and live His call to repentance.

Look at what He says to us. ***"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious (to the one who stays focused on Jesus), I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.***

Adam and Eve and their sin got them chased out of the Garden so they wouldn't eat of it. You and I, through faith in Jesus Christ, have our sins forgiven for all the times we have lost our first love and loved other things more. And He says to us, "Put your trust and your love in Me and that tree of life will be waiting for you in heaven and then you will live forever in the perfection of My presence." Until that time and as the people of God in this place at this time, remind each other to keep focused on Jesus as our first love and our greatest love. Amen.

**And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.**