



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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

April 6, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

Lenten Midweek 6

First Lesson: [Isaiah 60:3-11](#)

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Revelation 3:7-13](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 28:16-20](#)

### **Philadelphia: Neglect—Locked Out in Death's Night**

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, dear fellow redeemed:

If you want to know what is on someone's mind or why they are doing something, it's probably a good idea to go ask them. One of the congregations I served in Minnesota had two different groups in it and it was pretty obvious. If one group said "It's a beautiful sunny day," the other group would say "It's raining somewhere." They didn't agree on a whole lot of anything it seemed like at times. It seemed to be a family thing, a relative thing and it was pretty pervasive in that congregation.

I, as a young pastor, joined in a bowling league (my wife and I) that met once a month. It really wasn't much of a bowling league. It was just an excuse to sit and talk and half the time, people didn't even get up to bowl because they were too busy talking in the back. But it was a bowling league with a bunch of people from one of the groups. Of course that would cause problems in a little congregation.

Finally one of the guys from the other group came up to me and said "Pastor, how come you're bowling with them?" I said, "Because they asked me. If you want me to bowl with you, ask me to bowl with you." It's that simple. It's that straight forward. He says, "Oh, okay." But I appreciated that he took the time to come and ask me and he listened to the answer. He just didn't sit with his relatives over coffee and complain about "Why is he bowling with them? He should be bowling with us." If they would have bowled with me, they wouldn't have wanted me a second time. I don't know what the concern really was, but that's how we can be. We can get talking and chatty and all this other stuff and not focus on why that happens or what is going on.

Think of how often you and I do that to God. We get chatty and talking and say "How come this is going on and that's going on" that we never take the time to go back and ask God, and not just ask Him, but listen to Him or hear what He has to say. What is it that He really wants us to be doing as a Christian congregation in the area where He has planted us? I'm pretty sure it's not arguing about some of the things we argue about at times. In fact, I'm absolutely positive about it.

If you read the letter to Philadelphia, here is one of the two letters where He has NO condemnation for them. In all the other letters He says "I have this against you. I have this against you. I have this against you." (1) Smyrna, which also was dealing with a synagogue of Satan, He used the same phrase in that letter, and (2) Philadelphia, these are the two letters that He never said "I have this against you." In fact, He praises them even though outwardly Philadelphia didn't look like much.

Do you remember some of these other letters to other churches that we've been looking at? We talked about the church in Sardis last week. "You have the appearance of looking alive, but really you're kind of dead. You look like you're doing a lot, you look like you're active, but you've lost your first love." We heard that earlier. There are a lot of these congregations that look like they're really on fire and really doing stuff, but God says "I know your heart and your deeds are not complete." But to Philadelphia He says, "You're little. You're surrounded by the synagogue of Satan; those who claim to be Jews but are not." He tells us through Paul earlier that true Israel are all those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah. He says, "But I know your deeds. I'm the one who is holy and true." That is Jesus identifying Himself. He is the one who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can close, and what He closes no one can open. The key of David that He holds, that He has entrusted to the people of Philadelphia, to all the other churches in Revelation, and to all congregations of all time is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That means we use the ministry of the keys, proclaiming Christ as the only Savior. If you reject that message, you're locked out in the dark.

But look at what He says to Philadelphia, what is on His heart, His bowling league. "I have put before you an open door. I want you to go through it. I want you to share the message of Jesus Christ. I want you to get out there and talk about Jesus. I know how faithful you have been. I'll keep you from the great tribulation that is coming." "I'll keep you through it" is another way you could translate it. Some people use that verse to say it's talking about the rapture. I don't think that. I think He's saying "I'm going to preserve you because as you live for me and you are surrounded by the synagogue of Satan, the synagogue of Satan isn't going to think you are unicorns and cookies and cream. They're going to get mad at you! They are going to attack you, but don't worry, I'll take care of you. I'll keep you through it all." That's what He said to Philadelphia.

Imagine that you were hearing that letter for the first time as it was read to you from old man John. The old guy that you had heard about that was on an island in exile. He

writes and says, "Here is what Jesus says to you guys. 'I know that even though you are small and you don't have a lot of outward strength, I know how faithful you have been. I'm going to put an open door in front of you. I want you to go through and share the message of Jesus Christ to unlock heaven to those who don't believe it. Here is what I am going to do. The synagogue of Satan that is attacking you and persecuting you, I'm going to make them come and fall at your feet.'" Perhaps that means that some of them would hear the message, acknowledge that Jesus is the only way, and worship WITH them. Can you imagine the thrill of hearing that?! You are struggling. You are under attack from friends and neighbors. You get together in someone's home and you talk about Jesus. Then you hear this letter. Wouldn't that light a fire under you? "I can't wait to get out there and use the key of David! I can't wait to get out there and tell people Jesus is the only answer to their sin! I can't wait to get out there and tell them it's not about keeping ceremonial laws." It's not about keeping this law. It's not about the pagan god Dionysus, or the Roman god of wine, Bacchus. That was big in that area. It's not that. "You all can have your fun going out and getting drunk, but where I'm finding my joy and my fire is that I get to tell you that Jesus loves you, no matter who you are or what you've done." What an incredible message that would have been to hear! And then to know, your Lord told you "It's going to be hard. It's going to be difficult. You're going to be under attack. But keep doing it because what I open, no one can shut. What I shut, no one can open."

If you were here for examination (Good Confession) last Sunday when the kids talked about the ministry of the keys, isn't that exactly what Jesus is talking about here? He has given to individual Christians and to the local congregation the privilege of using the ministry of the keys to regain the straying and to comfort those who are mourning over their own sin. God has given us this privilege. So how are you doing with that?

One of my biggest pet peeves when my children were little (they aren't little anymore) is when they would do something that was wrong and I'd tell them "You have to go apologize to that adult. What you did was wrong. You need to go say 'I'm sorry.'" They thought dad was nuts. "Dad, quit being a pastor. Just let it go. Let it slide." Then when they would go and do it, here is this incredible privilege and power that we have (the ministry of the keys) to announce forgiveness to someone else. What would the adult say to my child? "That's alright. That's okay." You 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, how often I have threatened to throw shoes at you guys, I want to throw them at those adults that say that! It isn't "alright," otherwise they wouldn't be there saying "I'm sorry"! You don't go apologize for something that is "okay" or "alright." You and I have the ability to say to someone else, "I forgive you, and so does Jesus." And we're going to keep that tucked in our back pocket, like we're not going to use the name of Jesus, unless it's to complain about something?

We're kind of foolish sinners at times, aren't we? Don't leave that power of the Gospel tucked in your back pocket. Take it out and talk about Jesus! "I forgive you and so does

Jesus. Jesus lived and died for THAT sin. He isn't mad at you and neither am I, because He took it away." Has anyone ever said that to you? Do you ever say that to anyone? I'd suggest you start.

I've been blessed. I have someone that says it to me all the time. When I screw up all the time, my wife says "I forgive you and so does Jesus." That's where I learned that phrase from. I think that's an incredibly powerful phrase. It's not just saying "I forgive you but so does Jesus." We're unlocking the power, the sword of the Spirit that God has given us. This is the open door that He wants us to take (the ministry of the keys; the Gospel; this Law and Gospel proclamation) through to those who believe and to those who don't yet believe; to talk about who Jesus is.

Plant Gospel seeds in your personal mission field. That's what is on our back wall. I stand up here every week and I look at that and I get encouraged as I see more and more. There are times I wonder, *could there be more?* Are we going through every open door that God puts in front of us individually? Are we going through every open door that God gives to our congregation? I know some of our deeds, and I know we have people that do it, and I thank God for that. But I know I could do it better, so I'm assuming most of our members also could talk about Jesus more and go through that door more often and bring in with it the key that unlocks the door to heaven so that people aren't left in the darkness of unbelief, in the night that eventually will be unending.

Those same things that God said to Philadelphia, He could say to us. "I know your deeds. I know you have people that are doing this. And I know I'm putting more opportunities for you guys to do this." So ask God to open your eyes to see those opportunities. Ask the Spirit to fill your heart so that He speaks through you. Then the rest is all in God's hands. You and I can't believe for anyone else. All we can do is control how we share the key that unlocks heaven, because that's the task God gave to Philadelphia, to all of His churches throughout history, and that includes us here today. Amen.

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