



LETTERS OF LENT

Listening to Live | Wk. 3

March 10th, 2024

[Worship Music Playlist](#)

Prelude – Rejoice by Modern Post

WELCOME (cards & community) |

Good morning, all! I'm so glad we can gather together this morning as the church. **To come together on this day made for us, a day where we awoke into the light of our Father's rest**—a day for us to rest in God with us, God for us. Today is a day to set our mind's attention and heart's affection upon Jesus, our Light, and Life so that we might *be the church*, spiritual companions in gospel community, following Jesus together in our ordinary roles and relationships. To be the church, that's the aim of our worship together, remembering whose and who we are in Jesus and the life he calls us into (makes us ready for). So, for those new with us, we are glad you're here, and **we'd like to invite you to church**, *into the relationships that make the church indeed a faith family through Jesus*.

We'd also like to invite you to be like us, open and honest before God. Acknowledging our neediness and our struggles as we receive all that we need and more for life, praising God for his steadfast love and faithfulness, which is the source of our daily living. **Will you pray with me?**

CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 31

In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! **Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me;** You take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; **I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."** My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love! Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you; and worked for those who take refuge in you. Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. **Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!**

Song #1 – Dear Refuge by Trinity Grace

Song #2 – Sing Over Me by Porter's Gate

Dismiss Kids

LISTENING TO THE LETTERS | A Guided Reflection on Scripture

As you may remember, we have been looking at the early chapters of the Revelation the last few weeks as a way of practicing and participating in church season known as Lent. Now, Lent may seem to some of us to have a very specific mood. We think Lent is all sackcloth and ash, penance, and, of course, giving up stuff. But, as Jeremy has already mentioned a few times:

The Lenten road is a journey meant to stir our thirst for life whole and holy and to receive all that Jesus gives, without payment. Lent invites us to confess our neediness, our weakness, and yet our sinfulness. But Lent is not centered on our efforts and our plans, but in our becoming aware of and accepting where we are when, not if, our disloyalty comes to light. Lent is about becoming more aware of what Jesus has done for us and has given for us—so that we might respond in kind.

That's the aim of both Lent and the letters to the seven churches in the Revelation: to know Jesus as Lord, to see him for all that he is, speaking to those he died for, to those He has made new, and those to whom he continues to give himself...

And, today, here at roughly the halfway point of our Lenten Journey, we have something special planned. In lieu of a sermon, we are going to spend some time listening. Listening to the words of Jesus, listening to the Spirit, allowing the letters to the seven churches have their say.

So, I want to invite you to do a couple of things:

- Grab your Bible. The words will also be on the screen, but you may want to have your own copy in front of you.
- Grab something to write with.
- Pay attention! And take note of any words or phrases that grab you as they are read aloud. Write them down.
- Don't worry too much about why certain words or phrases jumped out to you, just continue to listen. We'll have an opportunity to discuss and process together in groups afterwards.

One last thing: Jesus words in these letters, can sometimes sting a little. You might feel a little uneasy with some of what He says, I might make you squirm a little. Remember, Lent is not about wallowing in guilt or shame or self-pity, but about allowing the Spirit to reveal to us where our loyalty has become suspect, where we might be missing the mark. So, even in words of rebuke and admonition, I invite you to receive all that Jesus might say as words of love, not as mere condemnation. All you're doing for the next few minutes is listening. Cool? Let's begin with prayer:

LENTEN PRAYER |

O Lord and Master of this life!
Take from us the spirit of sloth,
faint-heartedness, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity,
humility, patience, and love to Thy servant.
Yea, O Lord and King!

Grant us to see our own errors
and not to judge our sisters and brothers;
For Thou art blessed unto ages of ages.
Amen.

REVELATION 1:9-20 |

I, John, with you all the way in the trial and the Kingdom and the passion of patience in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of God's Word, the witness of Jesus. It was Sunday and I was in the Spirit, praying. I heard a loud voice behind me, trumpet-clear and piercing: "Write what you see into a book. Send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea." I turned and saw the voice. I saw a gold menorah with seven branches, And in the center, the Son of Man, in a robe and gold breastplate, hair a blizzard of white, Eyes pouring fire-blaze, both feet furnace-fired bronze, His voice a roaring waterfall, right hand holding the Seven Stars, His mouth a sharp-biting sword, his face the sun unfiltered. I saw this and fainted dead at his feet. His right hand pulled me upright, his voice reassured me: "Don't fear: I am First, I am Last, I'm Alive. I died, but I came to life, and my life is now forever. See these keys in my hand? They open and lock Death's doors, they open and lock Hell's gates. Now write down everything you see: things that are, things about to be. The Seven Stars you saw in my right hand and the seven-branched gold menorah—do you want to know what's behind them? The Seven Stars are the Angels of the seven churches; the menorah's seven branches are the seven churches.

Interlude/Song – Only the Sound by Young Oceans

REVELATION 2:1-29 |

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of consumeristic, in-name-only, religion, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who pretend to be God’s chosen people but who really belong to Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

“I know where you dwell, it is near Satan’s hideout. Yet you continue boldly in my Name; you never once denied my Name, even when the pressure was at its worst—to the point of martyrdom. But I have a few things against you: some of you are holding corrupt teaching. Don’t you remember Balaam, who seduced and sabotaged the Israelites, so that they acted against their consciences and practiced sexual immorality? You also have some who have fallen for that consumeristic, in-name-only, religion. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

“I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But why do you let Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet, mislead my dear servants into Cross-denying, self-indulging religion? I gave her a chance to change her ways, but she has no intention of giving up a career in god-exploitation. I’m about to lay her low, along with her partners, as they play their sex-and-religion games. I’m going to kill the bastard offspring of their idol-whoring: their followers. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each according to their deeds. But as for the rest of you, who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned what the evil one mistakes for profundity, on you I place no other burden. Only hold fast to what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Interlude/Song - Psalm 139

REVELATION 3:1-22 |

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

“I see right through your work. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will break in. Yet you still have a few Jesus-

people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

“‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Behold, I will take those who call themselves true believers but are nothing of the kind and I will humble their pretensions as they realize that its actually you that I love. Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him The Name, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven, and my own New Name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

“‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Oh, that you were either cold or hot! But, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you brag, saying “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,” not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Listen to me! Buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich; buy white garments so that you may clothe yourself and cover the shame of your nakedness; buy salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see—really see! Those whom I love, I reprove and I discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

Interlude/Song - Psalm 139

GROUP REFLECTION |

So, now we are going to break up into groups and discuss what we just heard. Both in the written words, and the unspoken words the Spirit may have led us to ponder. So, break up into groups of no more than four people. Ok, now have one person from your group come down front and grab communion elements and four copies of this communion sheet. If you were here last week, this should be familiar to you, if you can help explain it to anyone for whom it might be new. So, I won't offer a lot of instruction. I'll come back up and let you know when you should be turning to give and receive communion... But for now, we are going to take the next several minutes to respond and reflect on what we just heard... Let's pray.

LENTEN PRAYER |

O Lord and Master of this life!
Take from us the spirit of sloth,
faint-heartedness, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity,
humility, patience, and love to Thy servant.
Yea, O Lord and King!

Grant us to see our own errors
and not to judge our sisters and brothers;
For Thou art blessed unto ages of ages.
Amen.

So: groups of four, have someone come grab elements and communion sheet (now), and then, reflect, discuss, and respond in groups.

What did you hear in the letters to the seven churches?

Are you feeling...

- Unsettled?
- Unsatisfied?
- Anxious/worried?
- Exposed?

Why?

COMMUNION IN GROUPS |

Revelation 1:5, 6 says, “To him who loves us and has set us free from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father—to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Jesus freed us from sin by his blood... [POUR THE CUP]... but did you catch what else the Scripture said? It said we are now *priests*. Because Jesus not only freed us by his blood, but His body, once broken, [BREAK THE BREAD] now reigns *alive* over all of life—as Lord—both here and now and in the life to come, so that you and I might be priests. So while it might feel strange, we are tasked to *minister, one to another*. So, now we will turn to communion and serve one another, as priests, confessing one to another both our neediness and the truth of the Gospel, as we receive all that Jesus gives.

Song #3 – Rebel Heart by Lauren Daigle

Song #4 – Lose my Ability by Jonathon and Melissa Hesler

BENEDICTION | Revelation 1:4-8

As we rest in the day made for us, we prepare to enter into the work for which we are made [LIGHT THE CANDLE], receiving all that Jesus gives:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”