

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Easter 2
April 27, 2025
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Look who's with you on your mission!

John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is, who was, and who is coming, and from the seven spirits that are before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his own blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom and priests to God his Father—to him be the glory and the power forever. Amen.

⁷ Look, he is coming with clouds,
and every eye will see him,
including those who pierced him.
And all the nations of the earth will mourn because of him.
Yes. Amen.

⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, the one who is, and who was, and who is coming, the Almighty.

⁹ I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingship and patient endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus.

¹⁰ I was in spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard a loud voice behind me, like a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, “Write what you see on a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.”

¹² I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. When I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was one like a son of man. He was clothed with a robe that reached to his feet, and around his chest he wore a gold sash. ¹⁴ His head and his hair were white, like white wool or like snow. His eyes were like blazing flames. ¹⁵ His feet were like polished bronze being refined in a furnace. His voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ He held seven stars in his right hand. A sharp two-edged sword was coming out of his mouth. His face was shining as the sun shines in all its brightness.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. He placed his right hand on me and said, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last— ¹⁸ the Living One. I was dead and, see, I am alive forever and ever! I also hold the keys of death and hell.

—Romans 1:4-18 EHV

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! On page 2 of your service folder, we read these introductory words for our worship today: **“If Jesus had remained dead, all he would provide is an example of a beautiful life. If Jesus had remained dead, the mission of his followers would simply be to share helpful advice. “Here is how Jesus would want us to love one another.” Or “Jesus would want us to think about money like this.” Or “This is how Jesus would pray.” But because he lives, we now have a meaningful mission. It is not to share advice but to testify to what we have seen and know to be true. Christ has risen! Jesus is not a moral standard but our Savior. Jesus is not primarily an example for this life but the doorway to eternal life. His resurrection to glory will be the resurrection of all who put their faith in him. Sharing that good news—that’s our mission.”**

It's quite simple, isn't it? Our mission is simply to share that good news. Our mission is to simply testify to what we know to be true about who Jesus is and what he has done as our Savior.

Now, if you do that perfectly in every aspect of your life, then today's sermon probably isn't going to mean that much to you. If your life is flowing so easily as a follower of Jesus, you might not find this sermon to be of much help. If you have a life with no nagging guilt, no broken relationships, no secret addictions, no rejection by others; if you find it extremely easy to live your life for Jesus and to share the good news of Jesus with others, then you probably won't appreciate the words from Revelation chapter 1 as much as the Christian who's really struggling.

But I'm going to guess that's not you. I'm going to surmise that your life isn't perfect. I'm going to assume that you don't always share the good news with every single person in your life. In fact, I'm going to speculate that you might even have some moments of terror or fear in publicly living your life for Jesus or sharing the good news with people. I'm also going to guess that your life doesn't always flow so smoothly. But you find that there are challenges and difficulties.

If you fit in those categories, when you have moments when you don't feel like singing for joy or shouting with glee, then today's message is for you. The words from Revelation are just for you.

You see, in Revelation we see a lot of pictures. And just like the rest of the Bible, God tells it like it is. He tells us that evil is real. He tells us that the struggle is difficult. He shows us that when you seek to fulfill the mission of sharing the good news, you will find opposition. Not only will there be people and forces who hate your *message*, they will even hate *you*. Sometimes following Jesus looks like a recipe for disaster. Sometimes Christ's followers look like losers instead of victors.

But in every one of the pictures in Revelation, they all end the same: Jesus wins. He wins. He's always in control. He's always faithful. And the day will come when you will see him coming in the clouds, together with all creation witnessing the same thing. And then, not now, but then, the struggle will be over for God's people.

In fact, let me give you a glimpse of what is waiting for you toward the end of Revelation, and what is waiting for you at the end of your life. **"Look! God's dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away"** (Revelation 21:3,4). That sounds nice, doesn't it?

But to be honest, we need more than that for today and for tomorrow and for every day after until either Jesus comes back, or we leave this world. Oh, certainly it's a great comfort to know that Jesus will one day take us his people home to live with him forever. But if that's all the comfort that he gives, if the only comfort we have is to look ahead to what is waiting for us, well, then it still might not bring comfort to the languishing soul who struggles today.

That's what makes the first verses of this book so important. **"Grace to you and peace from him who is, who was, and who is coming, and from the seven spirits that are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."**

"Grace to you and peace." We might easily pass over those words because we hear them so often. But just because they are *common* does not make them *inconsequential*. Can we chew on those words for a few moments?

Grace is a gift. It's a gift that's given solely on account of the giver, and not at all on account of the merit of the receiver. Grace is the opposite of a paycheck. It's a free gift. No strings attached. And peace. Peace is more than the *absence* of conflict. It's the *opposite* of conflict. There is no anger, no fear, no grudges in peace.

Oh, you look at the world in which we live, and we don't see a lot of grace and peace, do we? You don't have to just look to the other side of the planet to see a lack of grace and peace with the wars and rumors of wars. Not at all! All we have to do is look at our own lives. We can easily see selfishness, anger, conflict, grudges.

And if that's what we see all around us, we might start to assume that that's how grace and peace work with God. We think about our far-from-perfect lives, and everything we experience can lead us to the conclusion that either God isn't doing his job or I'm not doing mine. Either God isn't the King that he claims to be or I'm not the Christian I claim to be.

I don't think we would ever think about it as crassly as that, but has the thought ever crossed your mind that God is letting you down? Or that he's not being fair? Or that he's paying you back for something you have done? Or maybe you don't think all that much about God because it sure seems as though he doesn't have much control of this world as he says he does. Maybe you just assume that you are in this chaotic adventure all by yourself.

So, it's good for us to hear these words of this last book of the Bible where God tells it like it is. God says that this is an evil age. And it doesn't just rear its evil head on the other side of the planet. It's in our own homes. It's in our own hearts. It doesn't only attack us from the outside. The worst of it is in the inside.

But in the midst of that struggle, you hear a voice declare, **"Grace to you and peace from him who is, who was, and who is coming, and from the seven spirits that are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."** Picture yourself on a barren battlefield, alone, unarmed, and you look up and you see the forces of evil bearing down on you. And on the one hand you know they are going to destroy you, but on the other hand, there is a part of you that just wants to join their side.

But then Jesus enters the scene. The great I AM who destroyed Egypt and delivered his people. The one who rose from the dead to conquer death. The one who always remains faithful to every word he has spoken.

"Grace to you and peace," he says. This is the one who appeared before John on the island of Patmos; the one whose **"head and hair were white,"** whose **"eyes were like blazing flames,"** whose **"feet were like polished bronze,"** whose **"voice was like the roar of many waters,"** whose mouth had a **"sharp two-edged sword coming out of it,"** whose **"face was shining as the sun shines in all its brightness."** This is the one before whom John fell over like a dead man in terror. This is the one who **"placed his right hand on [John] and said, 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last – the Living One. I was dead and, see, I am alive forever and ever! I also hold the keys of death and hell.'"**

That one says, “**Grace to you and peace.**” **Look who’s with you.** He descends to you on the battlefield, and he stands in front of you. And all the forces of evil combined don’t stand a chance against him. It’s not because you’re so powerful or worthy or noble. It’s because you have grace and peace from the risen Lord. He’s the **Alpha and Omega**. He’s the one **who is, and who was, and who is coming, the Almighty!**

And he loves you. Not just loves you in general, but he loves you in particular. He “**loves [you] and has freed [you] from [y]our sins by his own blood.**” That’s why you have grace and peace. It’s not because of what you have done for God. It’s because God died for you, and he’s forgiven every sin of doubt and fear and every other sin you’ve brought on yourself. There aren’t any strings attached to that. **He’s the one with you on your mission.**

Oh, the battle rages on, even though the war is already won. And you know what? Battles are hard. Someone you love dies, and the pain won’t go away. And there’s conflict in your home. And your heart aches more than you thought it could hurt. And there are demons you are struggling against, and they win so often that you wonder if it’s worth the fight. And rejection is hard when someone spurns you and the message you share.

So, we need to hear this. You have **grace and peace** from Jesus. And there’s no question about how the war is going to end. The day is coming when you together with all creation will see Jesus coming with the clouds. One day you will see clearly that it’s all worth it. You will see how he was with you on the battlefield, protecting you and keeping you close to himself, until he brings you home. **Look who’s with you for your mission!** It’s Jesus, your risen and living Savior. Amen.