**Ezekiel 2:1-5 July 4, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for today comes from our Old Testament lesson, Ezekiel chapter 2 here re-reading these words. “The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord God.’ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.” This is our text

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What a pleasure it is to come together and worship on this secular holiday, the exact day, the Fourth of July, Independence Day in our country. A day synonymous with what will no doubt be heard into the late hours of the night, the shooting off of fireworks. Is there anything in this world more temporary than a firework? I guess the flavor in a piece of gum, or the value of a new car after it’s been driven off of the lot. Fireworks are marvelous, brilliant, beautiful in the dark sky, and for just a moment, when a big one explodes you can see all around you as if it were daytime. For just the briefest moment, for just the most miniscule second, and then it’s gone. Back into the darkness. But for that tiny amount of time you were in the light. You could see what was around you, who was around you, and what was going on. That’s the light that a firework gives, a magnificent, beautiful, bright, loud, in your face, spectacular light, but it’s fleeting, it doesn’t last, you have to keep shooting off other fireworks, different colors, different shapes, different speeds, different amounts. What kind of a fireworks display would it be if all you saw was the same firework shot off in 3 second intervals for around 15 minutes? Dull. Boring. Uninspired. That’s not a fireworks show! We want entertainment! We’ve come to expect the new design we’ve never seen, or the sizzling ones, the huge ones, the loud ones, the ones that stay for longer and stream down. How boring it would be to only have a continued, constant light, that’s not a show. That’s what we experience every day when we wake up and turn on the lights in our house. It’s a different kind of light, it’s not one that elicts the “ooos” and “aahhhs” of a firework show, and you don’t want to find anything unexpected when you are turning on a regular light that you need to see. You don’t want to have to change it you want it to be reliable and to light your way, to guide you. It doesn’t get the applause that a fireworks show does, but it’s even more important because it’s the kind of light you need as you go about the work or your everyday life.

The lamp vs the firework. When it comes to entertainment? The firework by far. When it comes to a constant stream of practical light? The lamp. What about our faith? Is faith a firework or a lamp? Something that burns brightly and runs out, or a constant guide throughout our entire lives? For some God’s Word, their faith, their experiences in His presence, in His House, in His Divine Service or worship or care to them is nothing more than a firework. A blip on the radar of their lives. A firework that shoots off at their baptism. A firework that explodes around the time they are entering high school in their confirmation. A firework at their wedding. A final firework when they die. God is just a flash of light at intervals of their life. Maybe they hear about God, Jesus, His Work, His Word at a sporadic Easter, maybe at someone else’s baptism, confirmation, wedding, or funeral, maybe a Christmas Eve Service here and there. But it’s not constant. It’s not continuous. It doesn’t guide, it doesn’t last. It’s there for a moment, and quickly burned up.

Does this mean that God’s love is like a firework? His provision and care like a big boom in the sky? Does He only show us love in snippets? Tiny moments? Absolutely not! The rain falls upon the guilty and innocent, the just and unjust. He provides daily bread to believer and unbeliever, as a matter of fact, from what we just heard read in our Old Testament lesson, God’s love is so “inscrutable” as we say in the Gradual, God’s love is so hard to understand or make sense of, that He lifts up Ezekiel in His spirit, sets him on his feet, and sends him to the people of Israel, people who are rebels, who have rebelled, who will continue to rebel, who have transgressed against God or sinned against Him, people who are impudent, stubborn, and whose descendants remain that way, members of a rebellious house, people who just flat out won’t listen. And for them, if they are going to be given this opportunity to hear the truth, after all of their disrespect and rebellion, let’s be honest here, they should only get one shot, a firework in the sky, a momentary chance to repent and believe. The fact that they even get a millisecond in the light is too much for them based on what they have done, and yet God sends Ezekiel to tell them His Word and to call them to repentance. But is that Word just a firework? Or is it a lamp? A continuous love? A never-ending source of light, love, and forgiveness?

We see the truth in the Word of God, we see the truth in the love of Jesus Christ. God’s love is not a firework, it is not finite, it is not limited, it does not end, it isn’t curbed or stopped. God’s love is the blinding, continuous, strong, reliable light in our lives that guides us into the way of truth and illuminates the ways that we show our gratitude for His salvation. Through His Law, in the 3rd use of it, the guide that shows us the ways we can serve the Lord. God’s love isn’t a firework in the sky that quickly burns out when we don’t do exactly what He wants us to do. He doesn’t turn off the light and leave us on our own, like shutting out the lights and leaving a room. Like the power going out when you don’t pay the bill and you are left in the darkness. God’s love isn’t a firework, it’s a continuous flame, like we see here in our own Sanctuary, a never-ending light in our lives and in our hearts reminding us of His love and forgiveness.

It’s the world that gives the fireworks. The fake light that seems so entertaining, so different, so wonderful, but really it’s just a meaningless light that can’t guide or help. Fireworks aren’t made to be lights. They aren’t designed so that we use them to see, it’s no fault of their manufacturers, that’s not why we have them. They are entertainment. They are meant to amuse. It’s why they have to be rotated, set off at different times, in different places, it’s a game of amusement for the crowd. So it is in our lives. Temptation is entertainment in the same way. Sin that’s recognized for the horror it is can be easily thwarted. We see this in the concrete laws that we see and know are wrong. We aren’t murders. We aren’t open thieves, robbing banks or other people’s houses. But temptation comes in different ways, Satan uses different tactics, different avenues to illuminate the sinful flesh to see horrible, filthy, and disgusting acts against God as something entertaining and delightful. To believe that there is enough substance and enough light in the finite, spectacular fireworks of this life, compared to the true, reliable Word of God. When the light of the fireworks illuminate the sky, your head is up, you can see what’s going on around you, but you don’t see it, even though you can, you’re distracted to what is happening up in the sky. So it is with sin. We become distracted in the same way, with useless, finite, entertaining lights, with things that are meaningless in comparison to the truth of what we will experience for eternity, and when we think of our faith, our souls, our eternal life. But these other things get the attention. These moments are what keep us away from God’s Word, and His house.

God sends Ezekiel to the rebellious ones so that they will know, even if they rebel and refuse to hear, “That a prophet has been among them.” That the truth of God’s Word was spoken, and they are without excuse on the Last Day. That’s the God that we serve, that we love, a God who provides, a God who sends, a God who warns, a God who forgives and restores. The one who may only be a firework in the life of the unbeliever, but not because He hasn’t sent His light, or is the very source of light and life, but because they shut him out, close the shades, and choose to live in the darkness. But God’s providing hand never stops sending, loving, giving, forgiving. And what we are called to be, is His messengers to those who are living with the shades closed. To those who are distracted with the fireworks of temptation and sin. To come as Ezekiel did to those who are rebellious, who are impudent, who are stubborn, even to those who will refuse to hear, and continue to bring the pure, solid light to them despite their rebellion. That’s our calling, because we live in the light, not the fireworks, not the momentary joys of a fading world, we live in the pure light. The light of God. The true light of the world. The radiance of light that no Man can stand to see and live. We live in that light and know it, through His Word, through His Sacraments, through our study and through our lives as the very example of the love that He’s shown to us so many times in the past, so many times if we take the time to recognize in the present, and that we know He will show in the future no matter where His light guides us.

We close today with the words of our Hymn of the Day, the Hymn we just sang, as a reminder of Jesus Christ and Him being revealed to us as the true light, and the only light. This truth is shown in this wonderful hymn, that doesn’t just speak of Christ as the light as something that is good for us to dwell upon and just leave it there, this is a mission and witness hymn, this is a truth that is to be shared. “O Christ, our true and only light, Enlighten those who sit in night, let those afar now hear your voice and in your fold with us rejoice.” Tonight, you’ll hear pops, and if you look out you may even see some lingering sparks of light, this is the tradition of this day. A day of celebration and amusement with lights shining in the sky. That’s just for one day though. The mission of our church, and our lives, as God’s called children and His representatives to this world, is to let His light shine not just one day of the year in a flashy way, but in a continued, pure, stream of light through what we say and what we do, reflecting the true light of Jesus Christ out into our community and world, and letting them know the love of God through His very own Son.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.