

*Read also Isaiah 11:1-9. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

We live on a circle with four houses. An alley goes along one side of our house and in back. Two houses back up to the side of our house and two behind us. All the owners, except us, have changed—most two-three times, some even four times since we built the house twenty-two years ago. At least two of the houses are now rental property. We are the only original owners.

Some neighbors are good; others not so good. One who didn't like our type of grass installed a metal barrier between their yard and ours. Once, kids of another neighbor started a fire in the alley. One man almost died from a terrible infection and the family didn't even tell any of us neighbors until it was all over.

Near my neighborhood are three smallish churches, two larger churches, a huge Catholic church, and a popular megachurch. These churches influence my town. Some people would like the churches to make a greater impact—to become more “missional.” Leaders of the Church and seminaries focus largely on sending Christians out into the local community.

In the Bible one such leader was John, Son of Zebedee. He had owned a fishing enterprise, “The Zebedee Family Shrimpers.” But Jesus moved into the neighborhood. That's how John put it. Hear the story. READ John 1:14-18

Think of your own street. What if Jesus moved into a house on your street. What would the neighbors say? John said that's exactly what Jesus does.

John wrote another book in the Bible, late in the first century—maybe around 95A.D. and he talks about seven churches that existed at that time. These churches were laid out in a big semi-circle, about twenty-five to fifty miles apart. Because churches in the first century were at times persecuted, John wrote this to the seven churches to encourage them:

“Grace and peace to you from the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne; and from Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:4-5).

Did you hear mention of all three Persons of the Godhead—Father, Spirit, and Son—John says they are ever present.

The sevenfold Spirit refers to the one we read about in Isaiah 11:

- the Spirit of wisdom
- the Spirit of understanding
- the Spirit of counsel
- the Spirit of might
- the Spirit of knowledge and
- the Spirit of the fear of the LORD. (v. 2)

John knew his Bible thoroughly. He knew all about what the Bible said about the Father, the Spirit, and the promised Son. He referenced the Old Testament so you could see the faithfulness of God continues in Jesus Christ.

So when we read about “the God who is,” that means in this semi-circle, Jesus is there in good times and bad.

When John wrote “he moved into the neighborhood,” “he pitched his tent among us,” he didn’t move in to move out. Sixty years after his death and resurrection the churches at these seven towns were described as “seven lampstands” among which Jesus walked.

These churches were not established in memory of him or to commemorate him or simply to observe his ways. He did not move in to the neighborhood to move out.

Now think of Texas in 2014, rather than Asia in 95A.D. Jesus sees you—this church, and churches in towns like Ft. Worth, Tyler, Austin, San Antonio, Corpus, as lampstands bring light to the community.

John describes it:

I saw seven gold lampstands. And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were . . . white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze . . . and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance (Rev 1:12-16).

What’s that mean? Here Jesus is in the middle of the seven churches:

That’s the Baptists, and the Methodists, and the Pentecostals, and the African Methodist Episcopalians, and the Catholics, and the non-denominationalists, and the Presbyterians.

Christ is not an absentee. He is up and down Wheatland Road, Freeman and Main, Cedar Hill, Midlothian, up and down I-35, in Nebraska, Missouri—you get the picture—supporting you and me in the midst of our trials.

In Midlothian, there’s a dispute over a religious plaque on a school building which dedicates it to the glory of God. The sign has been covered and uncovered. The child of one of our members attends there.

Jesus is in the midst of that trial.

John envisioned Jesus wearing the garments of a king, with white hair. He’s not some old dude dressed in a weird robe. This is from Daniel, which speaks of the wisdom of the ages, and power of a king.

His are piercing eyes which burn through our hypocrisy; his voice is penetrating, going right for the truth; his bronze feet represent strength and stability. His face is like the sun shining with full strength.

Is that the kind of God you want walking with you in your own trials—a God filled with divine attributes?

John says, “We saw his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.”

Are you looking for his glory to be evident during your persecutions and trials?

John writes to the seven churches, “These are the words of him . . . who walks among the seven lampstands” (Rev 2:1). Then to each church he says, “I know all the things you do” (Rev 2:2). He said to each church, ‘I know what you are dealing with. I know your special circumstances.’ Then with each church he either commended them or corrected them for where they were diverting from him or falling down by weak faith. You need both encouragement and correction to grow.

So how’s he living among us? What’s he doing?

Jesus is speaking with grace and truth. Grace alone gets us nowhere. We need to be challenged by the truth about ourselves and the expectations of Jesus, to keep us headed in the right direction. We also need the challenge to follow the truth.

Once, my husband and I took a back road that would shorten the trip to our destination. We knew part of the road was unpaved. As we entered the road we saw a sign, “road closed.” But the road was not blocked off so we proceeded. Got nearly all the way to the cutoff for our destination and there was a barrier. He drove over a huge hump and suddenly our car was hanging on that hump, front tires not on the ground but the bottom of the car was and our shortcut became a very long wait for someone to drive by and haul us out. It was before cell phones.

It was the day we got married and we were heading to the airport. I’ll leave the rest of the story to your imagination.

So it is good to hear and heed the truth. Jesus challenges you with the truth.

But John says, even with that, it’s like “grace upon grace,”—inexhaustible grace. Jesus is patient with your mistakes, your troubles, your habits—while at the same time moving you toward wholeness.

The difference is like reading a book about how to fix a car and actually getting your hands messy and fixing it. We have to fix it so it works; we need experience to become an expert.

We can know what we are supposed to do as Christians, but until we practice our faith in the ups and downs, it won’t become real. Jesus gives us grace as we learn.

Until you speak about your faith as the elders are doing, you won’t speak. Until you give when you don’t see how you can, you won’t give. Until you ask him to break your addictions, you won’t find success.

Jesus has moved into your neighborhood—what does he find? Here’s a friend’s story. She was a breast cancer survivor whose cancer returned. She needed a special surgery which she had to

travel to another city for. She and her husband went to that town the weekend before her surgery on Monday morning. She woke up on Sunday morning with an overwhelming desire to go to church to take communion. She wanted to hear the Word. It's not that she didn't have that at home, or in her family, or with her Christian friends. But she needed Christ's presence and peace right then, that moment. So they left the hotel and walked down the street. Soon they found a church. The pastor was very comforting—like Jesus was there and knew all about it—and it made all the difference.

John reminds us—He's moved here into our neighborhood. Many people move away. But he's here to stay.

Hold fast to Jesus.

AMEN