



*Jesus' thoughts on*

*5<sup>th</sup> January 2025*



*being a faithful church*

*1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Epiphany*

### **Main Idea:**

Have you ever wondered what Jesus thinks about our community here at Southlakes Anglican? I have.

I really hope that if Jesus were to write to our church, He would tell us that we are a faithful, hardworking community who remain true to obeying His commands and the truth of His word.

As we study the seven letters Jesus wrote to the churches spread throughout Turkey, we will discover the characteristics Jesus desires His churches should have.

I'd like to start today's message with a visualisation. That is, I'd like you to imagine something happening that is completely aligned with what the Bible describes as truth.

Let's start by closing our eyes and allow our imagination to play out a picture using the eyes of our heart. We are sitting here in church. We feel the breeze of the ceiling fans circulating air around the building. We know there is another person sitting to our left and our right, possibly someone sitting in front of us and behind us. It's quiet, and we can hear the drone of the fans, hear the cars on the main road, and feel the hardness of the wooden pews beneath us.

Suddenly, there is a stirring as we sense someone entering from the back of the church. We resist the urge to turn around to see who it is. This person begins walking down the center aisle and confidently takes a seat in the front row. Every eye is on the back of their head.

All of a sudden, you hear someone gasp, "Oh my goodness! That's Jesus! Jesus has come to our church!" At this realization, no longer is anyone remaining in their seats – people are coming forward, many are falling to their knees around him. Others cluster around behind him, others on his side. Finally someone says,

"Jesus, what do you want to say to us? How can we be the church you desire us to be?"

I wonder how Jesus would answer. You can open your eyes again.

Let me reassure you ... we don't need to wonder. Because many years ago, Jesus shared His thoughts on exactly what He want His church to be. And so urgent was Jesus' message to His churches, that He directed John to write down what he heard and saw and send it to seven specific churches. (Revelation 1:10-11)

If you'd like to open your Bibles to the last book, which is called The Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is on page 1747 if you're using a Bible sitting on your seat. We'll pick it up from verse 12,

"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ...."

This amazing figure had hair which was "white like wool" and eyes that "blazed like fire". In His hand He held "seven stars", and coming out of His mouth was a "sharp double-edged sword." Of course, this figure is none other than Jesus Christ the risen Saviour Himself. No wonder "His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance" - He is, after all, the exact representation of the Father who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16 and Hebrews 1:3).

After declaring who He was, and the authority He now holds, Jesus again reiterated the importance of what John was to do. John was directed to "write what you have seen." Then, Jesus explains for us what the mysterious symbols mean that John saw. The seven stars held in Jesus' hands were seven angels, and the seven lampstands were the seven churches who were about to receive very specific letters.

Let's stay with this picture of Jesus walking amongst the seven lampstands, representing the seven churches throughout, what is now, Turkey. Jesus is the one who walks amongst the lampstands (2:1), so He is intimately aware not just of what is happening in each church, but what it means to live as God's people in each location. We'll see this more as we hear what He has to say to each church. I love how churches, in the realm of the spirit, are represented as lampstands.

A few years ago, I read a book called "*Women who risk: Secret Agents for Jesus in a Muslim World*" by Tom and Joann Doyle. The book tells of several separate stories of Jesus' miraculous encounters with Muslims living in different regions where Islam is dominant. One of the stories tells how a Muslim mother, named Heba and her son Ali, came to encounter Jesus. Each day they both walked to the markets, which went by way of a Baptist church. Knowing the danger if anyone ever discovered she was anywhere near the building, Heba always pulled her son's hand, to ensure they crossed over the other side of the street. But, whenever her son, Ali saw the Baptist church, he'd plead, "Mummy, why is that building glowing, can we go and see?" Heba didn't see it, but Ali insisted, the building shone from the inside.

One day, despite holding his hand as tightly as she could, he broke free and ran inside. When she entered, she heard singing with words of peace and hope, she did not know existed. The fruit of being pulled into this glowing building was that Heba and her son accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

This little story really gives reality to the symbolism we just heard. Every church which proclaims Jesus Christ as Saviour, Lord and God shines as a light in the specific dark location God has placed it. We are the lampstand upon which Christ the Light is placed in order for His light to shine forth without obstruction. Southlakes Anglican, our church, is that 'glowing building' as the little Muslim boy observed.

When our Emergency Relief customers come into the foyer in the hope of receiving food and support, they walk into an atmosphere where the light of hope shines, the love of acceptance circulates in the air, and the offer of a coffee or tea while sitting in a comfortable chair ensures they experience the peace that the world has yet to discover.

Now, when we first imagine this picture of Jesus walking amongst the golden lampstands, we may envision bright, shiny, carefully polished lampstands – like the ones on our Holy Table. However, as we'll discover more when we hear what Jesus has to say to His churches, in reality, some of the churches Jesus addressed were tarnished, had deep scratches and had joints which were quite damaged. Some of them were barely aflame and were in serious risk of being snuffed out.

Regardless of their condition, however, they still functioned as a lampstand in the location God placed them. If you are in a dark room, and you discover a candlestick with a lit candle, you don't

worry whether it has been polished or not – you are just thankful you have some light to help you find your way. In the same way, faithful church communities are real with each other.

We don't allow our Sunday bests to become masks that prevent others from knowing when we're struggling, when we need prayer or when there is something troubling us. We know there will be squabbles, disagreements, and arguments. These happened in the churches which the Apostle Paul established (Philippians 4:2-3). So, they'll happen in ours. There is no such thing as a perfect church. If you happen to find one, don't join it because it will no longer be perfect.

There is a paragraph from Eugene Peterson's book *Reverse Thunder* which I think will resonate with us,

*The churches of Revelation show us that churches are not Victorian parlours where everything is always picked up and ready for guests. They are messy family rooms. Entering a person's house unexpectedly, we are sometimes met with a barrage of apologies. St John does not apologize. Things are out of order, to be sure, but that is what happens to churches that are lived in. They are not show rooms. They are living rooms, and if the persons living in them are sinners, there is going to be clothes scattered about, handprints on the woodwork, and mud on the carpet. For as long as Jesus insists on calling sinners and not the righteous to repentance – and there is no indications yet that he has changed his policy in that regard – churches are going to be an embarrassment to the fastidious and an affront to the upright. St John sees them simply as lampstands; they are places, locations, where Christ's light is shown. They are not themselves the light.*

In the same way, God's churches are God's means for calling persons together so that they can realise who their Lord is, and who they are, and learn how to develop relationships which align with the kingdom culture Christ has established. Whether Southlakes Anglican is a tall, shiny, polished lampstand or a crooked, bent- out-of-shape humble, tarnished lampstand – we are still called to shine brilliantly in our community.

Is there anything in our lives that is blocking or obstructing the light of Christ from shining through our lives into our neighbourhood? Do our neighbours in our street know we bear the name of Jesus Christ? Do our friends at our tennis, Lions or Rotary clubs know that it is the hope of Christ that prompts the smile to resurface again and again on our face? Can the people whom we see each day at the pool, on the footpath, or in the line at Coles or Woolies, see the peace and joy that comes through knowing Jesus?

Let us ask ourselves these questions – for every single one of us – gathered together become the lampstand in Southlakes.

*Would you like to go deeper into what Jesus expects of his church?*

### **Introducing the "Journey through Christ's Letters to His Church" devotional:**

The book of Revelation is often deemed difficult to understand, with much symbolism and pictorial language used. Yet the first three chapters of John's book is filled with specific letters written to specific churches spread throughout modern day Turkey. These seven letters reveal very clearly Jesus' thoughts on what He expects from His churches.

Are we prepared to carefully study what Jesus has to say? Are we prepared to make a commitment to obey Christ's directions when He calls us to shine as a lampstand in the world? This devotional commentary will guide you through the seven letters allowing you to go deeper into each letter's meaning and how we can apply these lessons into our lives.

