The season of Lent is the rediscovery of our “first love”. It is a call to remember “the hour I first believed” as the hymn Amazing Grace puts it. It is a moment to reclaim and rekindle the deep and passionate love we have for Christ and His church and His people. The Lord Jesus wrote 7 letters to 7 churches that are recorded in the last book of the Bible; they were letters to churches then; they are letters to churches now; they are letters to our church today. Only two of His letters are universally positive; the other five have words of reproach and exhortation in them. No church today is any one of these 7 churches, but we are part of them; we can see parts of us in these letters; we can see things that need work in our own lives. But the promise, I think, with this is that if we take this seriously and if we allow the unvarnished truth to dawn in our hearts through the study of these letters that indeed our first love, our love for the Lord Jesus Christ, will be rekindled in our heart this Lenten season. May it be so.

The first letter is to the church at Ephesus. It is a center of pagan worship in Asia Minor. At the center of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemis, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. So the Ephesian church would have been small and insignificant in comparison to the heathen idolatry all around them. The Nicolaitians referred to in the letter, refer to a group of quasi-Christians who practiced idolatry and immorality under the banner of spiritual liberty. They were more in tune with the pagan culture around them than they were with the Bible and the Savior and the Holy Spirit. So the Ephesian Church stood strong against these Nicolaitians; they were not tempted nor dissuaded from the truth of God’s Word; they sought to get it right in relation to their belief and practice. All this we would assume was noteworthy and commendable. Jesus commends them in this letter – “your work, your labor, your patience and that you cannot bear those who are evil.” (Revelation 2: 2) They have made their stand in relation to the truth and have not wavered. But Jesus then goes on to say, “Nevertheless, I have this one thing against you…” (v. 4) What a sad day when the Lord Jesus Christ has something against His own church that His blood brought into being. And what is that one thing that He has against the Ephesian Church? He says: “You have left your first love.” (v. 4) And who was their first love? Why, Jesus, of course! They had been orthodox in their believing, they had striven against heretics who were trying to have them compromise with the pagan world, they had always sought to do the right thing. But in the process Jesus says that they have lost their love for HIM. O, what a sad day when the Master utters such things to His church!!!
As Presbyterians we love to get things right. We have an entire Book of Confessions that is trying to get our belief structure right. We are by nature perfectionists. We want nothing shoddy or second rate in our church. We want all our I’s dotted and our t’s crossed. No typos. No errors. We want the balance sheet to balance. We want the minutes to be correct. No misstatements, no failures, no mercy, no quarter, no forgiveness. We are Presbyterians and we want it all to be RIGHT. Silly Presbyterians, only God gets it right; only Jesus walked the face of this earth and got it right; only the nudge of the Spirit in this life can even hope to help us get anything even close to right. The Church at Ephesus were perfect Presbyterians, perfectionists endeavoring to get everything right. Except, except, except, that in the process they had lost their first love. They had forgotten that everything in the church was to be about God’s mercy and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We didn’t get here because we were perfect and we won’t stay here because we are perfect. O, but we do know the One who is. Our first love. Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember those times in our lives when God felt particularly alive? When we devoured scripture and still wanted to know more? When the light beamed brighter and everything in nature had a personal message for us from God? When we never counted the hours of the time we served Him because it was all joy? When we couldn’t spend enough time in church? When our thoughts were filled with love for Him? That’s returning to our “first love”. That’s what Jesus is admonishing us to do. Don’t be so correct that we lose Jesus in the process. Come back to HIM. Come back to LOVE. Come back to the hour we first believed.

Jesus admonishes us –“Remember therefore from where you have fallen ; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove the very light that lights your heart and church and soul...” This sacrament is a time to come back to HIM. This season of Lent is a time to rekindle that love we felt for God at first. This is a love letter from the hand of the Savior bidding us to turn back to HIM, to love Him powerfully again, to return to HIM who is the One person who has gotten this God stuff all right. Lord, may it never be said of us that we have lost our first love...or if it is true...that we will not turn around and return to love YOU once again. Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA

IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!