

## Everything in Love

✠ **God opens doors.** (vv.5-9)

✠ **We stand strong in faith.** (vv.13-14)

In the brilliant Name of our Epiphany Light, Jesus Christ our Lord, my dear fellow lights:

The day was off to a great start. Early, rested, great workout, prayers in a beautiful sunrise out our favorite window. Friday was my day off, planned for projects with time and energy, a gift of God when everything falls into place. See, I love little cubby holes on roll top desks. My oak desk has deep, dovetailed drawers with slotted sides for dividers – stamps over here, pens way back center, and chocolate nuggets with almonds right here, without looking. They go great with sermon studies, this week thirty-five pages. Quick review, and I was finally ready to write this sermon, when the fire department called.

“No fire, Pastor, no water damage. Your sprinkler alarm is going. You need to call for service.” Normally Jill would call our Property Committee, but it’s Friday, her day off, committee members out of town or working, but it’s my second try on this sermon. My plan to write Thursday night had to wait for meetings even though its better to finish studying and writing the same day. Motherly members over the years have often reminded me, “Pastor, God has a sense of humor.” This sermon is about planning, but it had to wait because my plans were overruled twice. In God’s school of grace, **Everything in Love**, as...

✠ **God opens doors.** (vv.5-9)

Who planned like the Apostle Paul? No Internet, email, cell phone, travel agents, not even “snail mail” on ships with oars. Paul traveled all over Asia Minor and Europe to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our ancestors. Determined, yes, but more importantly, Paul did **Everything in Love**, especially with the Corinthians. Hear the warmth? *“After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.”*

Sounds good, Paul, great plans. But they will get you into hot water with the Corinthians. We can read about it in the opening chapters of his second letter. Imagine a congregation of very talented Christians more full of themselves than of Christ. Pastors sometimes refer to them as “alligators” who chew up their ministers one after another. But Paul saw them all as redeemed sinners like himself who could not work or plan except by God’s grace. Even in a troubled congregation, *“the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands.”* (Isaiah 32:8 NIV) **Everything in Love** as **God opens doors**.

Does this Word of God seem relevant to you? Your job is fine, family healthy, vacations planned. Is life easy because you’re living for yourself with no commitment to Christ? Is your house top priority while God’s house suffers? Do you control your schedule while God calls for workers? Does God hear you *idly saying*, *“There is nothing I can do,” while the souls of men are dying and the Master calls for you?* (CW 573:4) Satan wants you busy and lukewarm. Then God can’t use you to reach others. But Jesus warns lukewarm Christians, *“I will spit you out of My mouth.”* (Revelation 3:16 NASB) Hear Christ’s call and repent. Then brace yourself. As **God opens doors**, Satan tries to slam them shut.

Grace grabbed your heart with the Gospel. You sing Christ at Christmas. You shine His Epiphany light. You plan more than *“a passing visit”* sometime around Pentecost, but then opposition fires up from unbelievers. The silversmiths start a riot in Ephesus. Your preaching is hurting their trade. They keep losing money on pornographic idols of their sex god Artemis. It’s nearly three years before you get to go to Corinth. Then the Corinthians are upset. You said you were coming but then you didn’t show.

About a year after our new members get active, they run into the reality of serving our Lord Christ among sinners like us. Our sinful nature wants, “What I want,” while Satan whispers, “Yeh, get what you want!” Roadblocks in regular life, pop up like rocks in a farmer’s field when you work for the Lord. Paul just wanted to visit. I just wanted to write my sermon. You just wanted to clean the church, but the doors were locked. Pipes freeze. Silversmiths riot. And God keeps calling: **Everything in Love**. Sometimes the harder you try, the more your nose bleeds from crashing into doors in the dark. God alone can turn on the lights. God alone can give us eyes to see His Epiphany. *“What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.”* (Revelation 3:7 NIV) Beyond sight, our greatest need is that...

### ✠ **We stand strong in faith.** (vv.13-14)

*“Be on your guard,”* can also be translated, *“Be on the alert,”* or, *“Be watchful.”* That means stay in God’s Word with mind and heart engaged, to watch for opportunities and watch out for enemies of the cross. This week I needed extra watching with six CD sermons from Pastor Don Patterson. I love “Hard Times and God’s Plan” about Ruth’s mother-in-law. Naomi could not see “99.9%” of God’s plans. Read those four sweet chapters in Ruth, then listen to the CD. Get ready for your next pipe-frozen Friday.

Without God’s Word each day how can **We stand strong in faith**? Life is chaos without Christ. Nothing makes sense. Nothing is real. What sense did it make for God’s Son to be born in a manger? We would rather be there a few weeks later with the wise men bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. We want to give to God our way, on our schedule. But have we forgotten how God sent the wise men back a longer way because King Herod wanted to kill the newborn Christ? Have we forgotten how the angel warned Joseph to flee to Egypt at night with Jesus and His mother Mary? Have we forgotten how the baby boys of Bethlehem slain by Herod’s sword trying to kill the King of the Jews? God kills us to make us alive. He makes us sad in order to make us glad. He takes away in order to give more. He unravels our knots to unfold His plans for new life in Christ. God will humble us before He lifts us up. He will tear us down in doubt and despair before He raises us up in hope, joy and thanksgiving.

God does **Everything in Love**, but we’re still learning to *“stand firm in the faith; be men of courage.”* Dean Lindemann at our pastors’ college used to quote the old King James: *“Quit yourselves like men.”* But most collegiates would rather just quit. In the real world of suffering, pain, death and sorrow, cold beer and parties run dry. Unless you **stand strong in faith**, you won’t stand at all. God doesn’t quit. From selfish determination He leads us to His shed blood that washed away our guilty fears and dries our tears in new life resurrection. *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

*“Be strong”* means God turns on His Gospel-power in your life, power made perfect in weakness, heartache, struggle. Stars shine brightest in the darkest night. God powers good even from our mistakes.

One of my favorite examples was when someone mistakenly posted the wrong sermon at [www.areasonforhope.net](http://www.areasonforhope.net). That mistake gave me one of my favorite illustrations of Christ as King and standing strong in the Lord. Pastor Patterson was watching his son play basketball until a ref stopped the game to talk to him and another player. Afterwards Pastor Patterson asked what that was about. “Dad, he was trash talking the whole game. I just kept saying, ‘Scoreboard.’” Look at the scoreboard. With Paul we can do **Everything in Love** because we know the score and how the game ends. Since Christ died and Christ has risen, Christ will come again. **We stand strong in faith** because God’s scoreboard always has Christ on top, our Champion overcoming opposition. **Everything in Love** – even when pipes freeze.

Remember that poem by an unknown poet? *My life is but a weaving between my Lord and Me. I cannot choose the colors or all the pattern see. Sometimes He weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride, Forget He sees the upper, and I the underside. Not ‘til the loom is empty, and the shuttles cease to fly, Shall He unroll the pattern and reveal the reason why The dark threads are as needful in the skillful Weaver’s hand As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.*

Dear Epiphany lights, plan, live, do – **Everything in Love**. Shine, Savior, mine! Amen.

For the study behind this sermon or for copies email [m.cordes@comast.net](mailto:m.cordes@comast.net).  
You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at [www.wels.us/newlife](http://www.wels.us/newlife).

New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church  
180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126