

Message: “The Challenge of Apathy – Part 1”, Week 1 of “Challenges Series”

Presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 09-18-2016
at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

The book of Revelation offers a unique insight given to the apostle John, by an angel and shares the testimony of Jesus the Messiah. It's a unique book unlike any other in the New Testament. Revelation 1 tells us: Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it. This morning I'd like to share Revelation 3:14-20 where Jesus admonishes the people of the church at Laodicea. He tells them that they lack zeal and are flabby in their faith.

Revelation 3:14-20

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”

Going back to the Gospels, Jesus is sitting with his disciples when he tells them that a time is coming when apathy will be rampant. He mentions that there will be people who will come and declare an alternative to discipleship, and many people will follow them. We will find ways to not put God first in our lives and will not be passionate for his kingdom.

Matthew 24:10-13 New Living Translation (NLT)

And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

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The good news is that we know who our shepherd is. We know the path and we can once again rekindle our passion for Jesus the Messiah so that we will be saved. Amen.

Carmen went to church. She had been a church goer since she was a child even earning her Sunday School attendance badges. She had some really great youth group experiences and had her children baptized in the faith. She really liked singing hymns. With her kids being older now, it's been harder for her to attend. You know, things get busy. And sometimes they ask you to do stuff. It's been 14 weeks now since Carmen has attended. I suppose part of it is her husband Mark. He really has never done church. And it's tougher to spend time together as family anymore. Sundays are just too valuable to spend on church. You could say that Carmen has gotten kind of lukewarm about church. I suppose a person could wonder, “What is the big deal with going to church? About Jesus Christ? Are all of these people just Bible-thumpers? A bunch of Jesus freaks? Are the buildings filled with people ready to tell you all that is wrong with you and your life?” I suppose that same person could say, “I'm really quite self-sufficient. I've been through stuff and seem to survive. What do I need Jesus for? I don't need a savior. To save me from what?”

Let's look at this scripture again:

Revelation 3:15-17 NIV

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

I was always slightly puzzled by what these verses mean but never really looked into it until I read about it with new eyes. I wondered why Jesus would want us to be cold. Why would Jesus want us to choose to reject his love and his teaching? I would think that if a person were on fire for Jesus that would be great, but lukewarm should be pretty good... right?

To understand what Jesus meant, we have to look at the context in which he was speaking. We have to look at the culture and the geography. This process is called exegesis, and if you become intrigued, this is what my Monday morning Bible Study will be like.

So let's travel back to the Galilee in the first century. The city of Laodicea was built in a region that was full of seismic activity and had experienced many earthquakes. As often happens in a seismic area, vents came up from the depths of the earth, allowing boiling hot

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water to reach the surface. In the nearby city of Hierapolis, these hot springs were famous. People came from great distances to bathe in those waters, believing they had medicinal properties. An experience in those waters was viewed to be therapeutic and effective in improving one's health.

Now, another city named Colosse was not too far away. As Hierapolis was known for its hot springs, Colosse was known for its cold waters. Just as people journeyed to Hierapolis to bathe in the hot springs for health purposes, people would travel great distances to vacation in Colosse, where they could invigorate themselves by taking frequent dips into the famous, refreshing, cool-to-freezing waters of that city.

Laodicea may have been the biggest and richest city in the area, but it had neither hot nor cold water. Therefore, the people of Laodicea had to leave their luxurious homes and travel to Colosse if they wanted to enjoy fresh, cool water. On the other hand, those who desired to soak in the hot springs had to travel six miles to Hierapolis.

Once in an attempt to bring the hot water from Hierapolis to Laodicea, a huge construction project was commenced. The goal of those who initiated the project was to build pipes that would channel the hot water six miles from Hierapolis to the city of Laodicea. The pipes effectively delivered the water - a real feat of construction at that time. Sadly, however, the water lost its heat along the way. By the time the water reached Laodicea, it was not only lukewarm, but it had developed a sickening, nauseating taste. The taste was so revolting that no one wanted to drink it!

So in mentioning the hot and cold water Jesus wasn't speaking to their spiritual zeal or lack. He's not saying, "Pick a side, any side, as long as you commit to something." Or that He would rather we be willfully cold towards Him as a way of showing some sort of truthful integrity if we aren't very thrilled about how we feel about God at the moment. What Jesus is saying is much more shocking.

Rather, both "hot" and "cold" were considered good and useful, healing, refreshing... useful! It was only "lukewarm" that had a negative connotation. Rebuke was directly related to their "lukewarm-ness" - their spiritual slothfulness.

Instead of being useful in service for the Lord, as the hot and cold waters of the area were useful, they were comparable to the virtually useless water of their own city, and Not only was the water useless, it had actually become stale and pungent. It was "pukey water." Jesus says, 'I want water that will refresh me, but you remind me instead of the water you always complain about. You make me want to puke.'

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The Laodiceans prided themselves on their wealth and self-sufficiency... yet they didn't even have useful water that tasted good and Jesus used this to illustrate their spiritual self-sufficiency and pride, and how He felt about it. He found their indifference repugnant. They forgot that God is on the throne. They forgot that Jesus Christ is who he says he is and did what we read that he did. They forgot that there is something more than what we see all around us.

So how do we get back our zeal, how do we become like the hot or cold springs? Useful, invigorating, healing and full of life?

Think of this... if you expect miracles, you'll see them all around you. If you just go through the motions expecting that God isn't relevant, you won't see the spiritual.

We Assemble. Let's think about what we do when we assemble.

1. We share the Lords supper
2. We open the Holy word of God and the pastor, who has studied the word, interprets it for us and helps us apply it to our lives.
3. We gather the first fruits from our storehouses together to do two things;
 - a. Offer our gratitude to God by giving generously – which demonstrates our level of trust in God.
 - b. We care for the widow and the orphan, those in prison and those who are hungry and naked. We also expand our ministry to reach more lives for Jesus Christ.
4. We share our testimony and we hear the testimony of others
5. We pray. We continue to ask God to stoke our fire so that we can be a lighthouse to others.