

Easter 6 – Year C
May 9, 2010
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Revelation 3:14-22
Pastor Paul Horn

“Are you hot, cold or lukewarm?”

¹⁴ *“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. ¹⁵
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. ¹⁸ 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.*

*¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. ²⁰ 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
him, and he with me.*

*²¹ To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and
sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to
the churches.”*

Mother’s Day – a time to remember and thank God for our mothers who cared for us, who provided hot meals, ran a hot bath. When they took our temperature and discovered that we were hot, they provided a cold drink, a cold compress on our foreheads. When we had the chills, they wrapped us up tight, held us and even rocked us. But you probably never heard from your mom, “I made your favorite meal for you tonight, and it’s lukewarm!” or, “Would you like me to warm up your glass of ice cold milk?”

Our Savior Jesus talks about temperature in our lesson this morning. Apostle John had vision of his Risen and Ascended Savior. In this revelation Jesus told John to write a letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. *Angel* in Greek means *messenger*. Jesus wanted John to send this letter to the pastor of the congregation. Laodicea western region of modern day Turkey. In vs15 Jesus said to the congregation in Laodicea, **“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!”**

Jesus wished that the spiritual temperature of this congregation was hot. The word Jesus uses for *hot* is where we get our English word for *zeal*. He hoped that these believers were zealous for the Gospel message. Jesus expected to see excitement for the divine service, interest for outreach and Biblical education. But our Savior did not find this attitude in this congregation.

Jesus hoped that if they were not hot, at least their spiritual temperature might be cold. If someone is cold toward the gospel, that means they oppose it. Jesus said that he would rather have the Laodicean congregation be cold because at least they had some religious zeal, even if it was negative. At least they would still have had an interest in things spiritual.

Whereas lukewarm... that was a dangerous temperature to be at. Being spiritually lukewarm means that they did not care, there was a lack of interest for things spiritual, there was no sense of need for the gospel.

The letter that Jesus dictated to John provides hints as to why the Laodiceans were lukewarm. Laodicea was a wealthy city. The city was a well-known banking center. They had their own mint that made coins for the Roman empire. They had a profitable textile industry, their cloth was famous throughout the Roman empire. They were also renowned for salve that was invented to heal eyes. An earthquake destroyed Laodicea in 60AD, but the citizens rebuilt it without any help from Rome, which they took great pride in. In vs17 Jesus said to them, **“You say, ‘I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’”** Jesus, the great Amen, the faithful and true witness, who knows all, even the hearts of sinful man... said to the congregation, “You think you have everything you need. But you don’t feel that you need me. And so, this is what you really are... Vs17 **You are miserable, to be pitied, poor, blind and naked...**” ouch...

The members of that congregation were missing something important in their lives. They did not know that they were spiritually bankrupt, but their sin had been exposed but they were too blind to see their poor spiritual condition. Jesus wanted this congregation to be hot, to be on fire for the gospel, like when they first heard it. But now, it was evident that this congregation was spiritually dull and indifferent. The people were living under the delusion that they were entitled to God’s love and were assured of everlasting life. They had no more need to hear God’s gracious forgiveness in the Word and Sacraments, where God reaches down to his people through his Gospel to strengthen them and guide them through life, but, ah, they said, “We don’t care, we have no interest in it, there are other things we need to be concerned about...”

In Vs16 Jesus issued a warning of judgment, **“Because you are lukewarm, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”** Literally, in the Greek Jesus says, *vomit*. I will vomit you out of my mouth. You are in danger of losing me and your eternal salvation, because you care more about your material stuff than you do about the Gospel. You’re more concerned about yourselves than you are about what you really need; the good news of Jesus.

Are you hot, or cold or lukewarm? I think it’s safe to say that none of you are cold, otherwise you wouldn’t be here. Are you hot, that is, zealous for the gospel, on fire for everything having to do with God’s Word? Or maybe the truth is, you’d like to be hot, but too often you have to admit that when you take your spiritual temperature you find yourself lukewarm at best? Now, Jesus is not talking about your feelings. Your spiritual temperature is gauged by your priorities and attitudes. Let’s take our spiritual temperature, shall we?

Have you ever found yourself making excuses why you shouldn’t take advantage of opportunities to be refreshed by the Gospel? Have you ever convinced yourself that there are other things that are more worthy of your time than the study of God’s Word or the divine service or the Lord’s Supper or a Baptism or outreach or a building project? Have you ever thought to yourself, “I go to church because I feel it’s the right thing to do? I go to church because my mom or my wife makes me. I go to church because of the fellowship.” Have you ever made an excuse for why you do not take time out of your busy day to sit down with your Lord in private devotion, even if

for just a small amount of time? Have you grown less and less concerned about spiritual things? Have the pleasures of this life and the riches of the world dulled your sense of spiritual need?

If so, then Jesus says, “I know your deeds. You are lukewarm and I’m about to spit you out of my mouth.” You think you’re ok, you think you have everything you need, in reality your lukewarm attitude makes you poor; spiritually bankrupt. And blind; you really don’t understand the seriousness of your condition, do you? You don’t see your need for the gospel, which is a dangerous place to be. And you’re naked; your sin has been exposed.

Why does Jesus talk to us this way? Remember when you were a teenager and you thought you knew everything and you made some poor choices and your mother grounded you? Why did she mother do that? Because she loved you. She taught you that there are consequences for your actions. She taught you God does not treat sin lightly.

Jesus says in Vs19 “**Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.**” Jesus’ love for us will not allow sin to go uncorrected. He says Vs20, “**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 him and he with me.**” Remember that Jesus is speaking these words to a Christian congregation. Many people like to use this passage to prove that we have something to do with our conversion, that we open the door for Jesus to enter our hearts. We don’t. We can’t. We’re dead spiritually. Jesus had to raise us from our spiritual death through baptism. Here, he is knocking on the door to the heart of a Christian and saying, “Christian! Open your ears and your heart and listen to me! I’m trying to make you see the error of your ways. This is a dangerous path you’re going down. Take my words seriously and repent!”

I pray that you are listening to Jesus’ words, and that they are shaking you out of your spiritual apathy, as they did for me this week, and I pray that you do repent, that you are sincerely sorry for those sins, and in faith, that you humbly turn to Christ and seek his forgiveness. When we turn to Christ in repentance, he gently says to us...

I will cover up the shameful nakedness of your sin and I will make you rich. This is what I offer you, what the world with its wealth and pleasures cannot offer... vs18, “**Gold refined by fire, so that you can become rich.**” Your Savior is not talking about stock commodities in precious metals. The Apostle Peter says, “**For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.**” (1Peter 1:18) The blood of the Lamb, innocent and holy, sinless and perfect, shed for you and on your behalf... that blood the Father considered as enough payment for your sinful attitudes and priorities. That blood has been given to you through faith. You are worth more than gold. You are truly rich, because by his death he saved you from the fires of hell. By his resurrection he has given you eternal life. You have endless riches.

He says in vs18, “**I give you white clothes to wear to cover your shameful nakedness.**” Yes, our sinful lukewarm attitudes expose our ungodliness. We know that we cannot stand before a holy God without being as he is; holy. Jesus covers over our many sins of indifference with the white robe of his righteousness. For Jesus’ life was righteousness, pure and perfect. He never was indifferent, always zealous for God’s Word, always eager to learn, always eager to share with

someone who did not know it. Having been washed with water and the Word through baptism, his robe of righteousness has covered over your sins. His righteousness is the robe you will wear as you stand before God on the Last Day.

This good news from the lips of our Risen Savior changes our attitudes and priorities. His Word changes our spiritual temperature. Now we say, "I want to go to worship because I know God will feed me there. I know I need it! I will pay attention to the Lord's Supper Sundays marked on my church calendar and look forward to it, because I know I need it. I will clear my schedule to stay for Bible Class or I'll keep Wednesday evenings open, or I will set aside 10-15 minutes in my busy schedule for a short devotion, and make it the most important appointment of the day because I know God speaks to me there. I need that."

On this Mother's Day we thank God for Christian mothers who brought us to the baptismal font, where the Holy Spirit first ignited in our hearts the fire of faith. We thank God for Christian mothers who brought us to church so that the gospel would continue to fan that flame in our hearts. We thank God for Christian mothers who by their example show that they are on fire for the gospel. And finally, we ask you, O Lord, that you would take away my tepid attitude, that you would remove my lukewarm priorities, and through your gospel to reignite in my heart a burning zeal for your gospel. Amen.