**Revelation 3:14-22** March 6, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Ash Wednesday

*Revelation 3:14To 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. 15I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17You 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. 18I 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.*

*19Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20Here 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. 21To 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. 22He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Don’t Fool Yourself!**

I read from the recipe card, “Put yeast in lukewarm water.” I was back in grade school. “Mom, what does ‘lukewarm’ mean?” “Lukewarm means that if you put your hand in the water, you won’t even feel it. It’s not hot or cold. It’s not even warm or cool. Same temperature. That’s lukewarm.” That definition has stuck.

Lukewarm might be just right for the yeast when you are making doughnuts on a school snow day. But if you were paying attention to our reading, lukewarm is obviously not what our Lord Jesus Christ wants to see in his people. When Jesus brings this accusation of lukewarmness, neither hot nor cold, he is not merely unimpressed. He condemns it.

But let’s go back a bit. What’s going on here? So, in the beginning of the book of Revelation, Christ Jesus tells the Apostle John to write seven short letters from Christ to seven different churches that are kind of close together. Each letter is different. The other six letters have some commendations and some reprimands. But to this church, the church in Laodicea, Christ has nothing good to say. This letter to these Christians is the most negative of all the letters.

Which is strange. Because the other churches have some serious problems. Read chapters 2 and 3 and you will hear Christ reprimand them for rampant immorality and false teachings; glaring sins. Christ let them know it. Here in Laodicea, there was no glaring immorality, no identified false teaching.

So what is the problem that is worse than all the others? ***“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.”*** Christ sees Christians who don’t want to be heathens, but they don’t really want to be Christians. They want the name of Christ without the commitment, without even saying thanks.

How often you and I see this. How often we hear this! “I don’t have to go to church to be a Christian.” “I have a Bible over there, and I can read it whenever I want.” “I pray every day.” “I can’t get to church because I have arthritis.” “I work.” “I have trouble getting up early.” And that is only the beginning. Then come the excuses about the people at church, how they are hateful and unfriendly and don’t understand and don’t share the same interests. And then there is the way that we worship with music that people don’t like, and is kind of boring, and is the same thing all the time.

Christ says to these lukewarm people who are trying to cover their bases just in case Jesus Christ should happen to come again one day in glory to judge the heavens and the earth and to hurl all who have rejected him into the fires of hell… Just in case, they will lightly carry the name of Christ around. Not doing anything about it. Not supporting his ministry with their time, talents or treasure. Not encouraging other Christians. Just having enough of a vague Bible knowledge that ought to be enough to save them—and let everyone else figure out for themselves, thank you very much. Christ says to this crowd, ***“So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”*** (Actually, what Christ Jesus told these lukewarm Christians was that he was going to vomit them out of his mouth, but the translators of most modern English Bibles apparently think it’s a little too indelicate, so they tone it down.) “You make me sick!” is what Christ says to lukewarm Christians.

While we could point fingers all day, and even name names, what we should really be asking is if we are lukewarm Christians.

Perhaps the best way to figure out if I and you are lukewarm is to ask yourself, “Is there a struggle?” Now understand that correctly. Usually, when people say, “I struggle with alcohol [or something else]…” what they are saying is that they fall into that sin fairly often, and while they realize it’s not good, they aren’t going to get the gumption up to deal with it. “It is what it is,” “I am what I am.” They don’t “struggle” with it, they surrender to it. The very definition of lukewarm.

“Struggling” with sin is very different! Temptation enters your mind. You have a desire to say, think or act and you fight it. You fight it with the word of God. You fight it with prayer. This struggle causes you stress. It might even cost you something. And when you sometimes fail in this fight, you feel the guilt and you take that guilt to Jesus, and then you get back into the ring for another round. That is struggling with sin!

If there is no place in your life that this is going on, if there is no fight with the Evil One, if no internal battle to do what is right even when you don’t want to, then you should seriously ask yourself if Christ would call you lukewarm, worthy of being spat out.

Here is the lukewarmness Christ saw in Laodicea, ***“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing!’”*** Wow! Isn’t that what we want? We live life hoping hoping to get to that place. Debt free. Free of health concerns. To the comfortable retirement where we don’t have to clock in. We plan to see some places we’ve wanted to get all our lives. To not have to live paycheck to paycheck? Isn’t that self-sufficiency what the American way is all about. ***“You say, ‘I do not need a thing.’”***

That’s what these Christians thought. They had what they wanted. In this wealthy city of the Roman Empire there was a mint that minted the money for that part of the empire. They had a renowned wool industry which produced a fabric known and sought after throughout the Roman World. The doctors of Laodicea developed a celebrated eye-salve. These are historical facts.[[1]](#footnote-1) Life was good. No needs. This lack of need had a corrosive effect on the spirituality of these Christians. In the end, they looked at church and kind of shrugged their shoulders, “What’s the point?”

Christ says, ***“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.”*** “You may have everything you want. You might even have everything your neighbors want. When the fire of Judgment Day burns it all to ashes, you will have nothing!” The bags of freshly minted coinage, the bolts of beautiful fabric, jars of the healing medicine—worthless. And if such are your treasures, your #1 pursuits of life, what you brag about to your friends, Christ is ready to spit you out.

Even though Christ threatens to vomit these people out of his mouth, he says this: ***“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.”*** This might be a surprise, but he doesn’t hate these people. He loves them. People hear harsh words, and they assume that there is a hateful person saying those words. Not Christ. He has said what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. He is the doctor who has diagnosed the cancer, but has a 100% guaranteed cure. Christ calling out the lukewarmness of these people is love, not hatred.

Repent. Turn your lives around.

And so he directs them, ***“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.”*** Go to Christ. Make him the treasure of your life.

Now we might expect that these lukewarm Christians, if they actually do straighten things out, to just get into heaven by the skin of their teeth. Not at all. To those who simply listen to the Savior, who hear his invitation, and instead of reacting defensively or even aggressively, simply repent, Christ promises the richest blessings imaginable. Christ says to even these pathetic lukewarm Christians—and here is where we have our hope—he says, ***“If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”*** A meal with Christ himself! ***“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.”*** No second class seats in heaven.

***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”***  Amen.

1. Becker, *Revelation,* p.76. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)