

JJ

8th Sunday a. Trinity
July 25, 2010
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

Text: Revelation 3:14-22 *“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ‘I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’””*

Theme: “Anniversary Letters from Jesus”
- “Repent of a lukewarm faith!”

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

We are interesting creatures of faith, aren't we. Take for instance how prosperity and struggle affects our faith lives. When was it that you found in your life you were praying frequently and fervently to God and seeking for answers in His Word? In times of prosperity or in times of difficulty? And when was it that you found dust collecting on your Bible and your prayers few and far between? In times of prosperity or in times of difficulty? It is sadly amazing how when we are going through difficult times we fervently pray to our heavenly Father that He would relieve us of our burdens and grant us prosperity. In such times we are in frequent communication with our Father, praying fervently, and turning to His Word for comfort, strength, and direction. But it seems that once good times come upon us - good grades, good health, good harvests, and a good income - that we become comfortable and complacent in our faith.

This is where the congregation in Laodicea found themselves. They were a wealthy congregation living in a wealthy city. The six other congregations Jesus wrote to, seemed to be struggling with either external matters or internal matters. The Laodicean congregation was struggling with nothing. They thought they had it all. They were saying of themselves, **“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.”** They were complacent in their faith. Having all of their material needs met, they thought they were set. They felt that they really needed nothing from God and nothing from Jesus. This led to a lukewarm faith - a faith that was neither cold to Jesus and His Word, nor hot - on fire with zeal for Jesus and the Gospel. And such a lukewarm attitude made Jesus sick. **“Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth.”**

As Jesus has given us ears of faith to hear, let us listen to what the Holy Spirit says to the churches. This is the last of the seven letters Jesus wrote to the seven churches in Asia-Minor and concludes our sermon series on “Anniversary Letters from Jesus.” Yet this call to repentance is very important to us as we are very susceptible to this lukewarm spiritual condition. Let us examine this lukewarm faith and repent of such an attitude toward Jesus and His Word! May the Spirit help us to hear and apply His Word to our lives!

Revelation 3 is not the first time we hear of the congregation in Laodicea. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul makes mention of the Laodiceans 4 times. He even speaks of an epistle that he wrote to them, a letter from Paul which the Holy Spirit has not been preserved for us today. In the decades which followed Paul’s writing to the Laodiceans, it seems that things went downhill. Well, we should be clear - in Jesus’ eyes they went downhill. To the congregation in Laodicea, things seemed to be going quite well.

The city of Laodicea was quite wealthy. It was a center for commerce and an important banking center. When an earthquake struck in 60 A.D. the citizens were able to rebuild the city themselves, without any outside funding. Laodicea was well known for its manufacturing of clothing and its medical school. The school had developed a sought-after eye ointment made of Phrygian powder. Jesus seems to touch on each of these things which Laodicea was well known for - its wealth, clothing, and eye ointment when He addresses the congregation.

The congregation in Laodicea seemed to confuse the same thing that many modern congregations struggle to understand properly - equating material wealth with spiritual wealth. **“I am rich, have become wealthy, and am need of nothing.”** They thought they had it all. Their bank accounts were full, their church attendance was up, they were well clothed and well fed. Looking at the books, everything was going right for them and they thought they were lacking nothing.

But when Jesus the Amen or “Yes, it is most certainly true;” Jesus the Faithful and True Witness - Jesus who saw things as the truly are; Jesus, true God, the Beginning of the creation of God; when this Jesus looked on the congregation He saw something much different. **“You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”** Everything they had materially, they lacked spiritually. They were wretched and miserable sinners, they were spiritually bankrupt and poor, they were blind to the things of God, and stood naked and exposed before Him.

The congregation in Laodicea was spiritually lukewarm to Jesus and His Gospel. And this made Jesus sick. **“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth.”** Someone who is spiritually cold is someone who is an enemy of Jesus and the Gospel. Someone like the Apostle Paul was before His conversion. Jesus *WISHES* they were like this - then He would have something to work with. His Gospel could convert them as He did with Saul. But they are not cold to Jesus. Nor were they hot for Jesus. Someone who is hot in the faith is a person who gladly hears and learns God Word. Someone like the tax collector who prayed for mercy and looked to Jesus for forgiveness. But they were not hot. They were lukewarm.

As a lukewarm congregation they had the Means of Grace, they had the Gospel both in Word and in Sacrament, they already had all the tools that the Spirit uses to create and sustain faith. But they cared nothing for it. If the preacher brought the Law to them, they thought it was interesting, but didn’t really apply to them. If the preacher brought the Gospel to them, it did

nothing for them. Being materially secure they thought they had all they needed from God. They were neither cold nor hot, but had a lukewarm faith. And this made Jesus sick. He was about to spew or vomit them out of His mouth - reject them from the body of believers.

Notice what Jesus says, though. "I *WILL* spew you out of My mouth." He was about to, but had not done it yet. And why is that? Why do you suppose Jesus is writing to them and telling them what He was about to do? Jesus shed His blood and died for the sins of a lukewarm faith. Jesus still loved this lukewarm congregation and was calling them to repentance. "***As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.***" Jesus was knocking on the door of their hearts. He stood outside, calling them to repent of their lukewarm ways. Jesus was rebuking and chastening them because He loved them. He wanted to make His home within their hearts, and like Matthew, to dine with these sinners. Jesus is calling these lukewarm Christians to repent and be zealous for Him and His Gospel.

If you've seen the doctor in the last year or so, you've probably noticed the new the new way they have of taking your temperature. Rather than the old oral thermometers that they used to use, they now use temporal thermometers. All they need to do is run the thermometer across your temple to your earlobe to get an accurate reading of your temperature. It is quite a bit faster and more comfortable than the old mercury filled, oral thermometers.

If Jesus were to take the spiritual temperature of the CLC right now, or of Prince of Peace, or of you, what do you think the spiritual thermometer would read? Hot, cold, or lukewarm? As far as I can tell, none of you are enemies of Christ and His Gospel. None of you are cold. Are you hot? Are you burdened by your sins and long to hear the good news that Jesus saved you from your sins? Sadly, we must confess that there are times that Jesus should spew us out because our lukewarm faith.

We live in very prosperous times. Most everyone here has either multiple cars or multiple televisions in their home. None of us is going hungry. To my knowledge, few of us are going through any severe hardship at this time. We are a congregation that is at peace with one another. There are no major controversies stirring in the CLC right now. The danger is that we fall into a lukewarm slump. We run the risk of simply go through the motions as the congregation in Laodicea was doing. Take a serious look at your heart and your faith right now. Do you see the need to repent or do you feel, like the Laodiceans, that you have it all?

Jesus is right now, knocking at the door of your heart. Do you hear His voice? He is knocking because He wants to come in and dine with you. He wants to keep company with you in your heart. He is calling you to repent of your lukewarm ways. Repent of your lack of desire and zeal to hear the good news about Jesus as your Savior.

Listen to Jesus' counsel, "***I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see.***" Rather than searching out for the riches of this world, Jesus urges us to pan for gold in His Word. In His Word you will find the eternal riches of His Gospel. Gold that was refined in fire as Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses and raised again because of our justification. Gold that has no impurities, but only the riches of heaven.

Rather than the garments that Laodicea was known for, go after the white garments of

Jesus righteousness. Because of the robe I am wearing this morning, you can't tell if I've torn my shirt or spilled syrup on it from breakfast. It covers any spot, stain, or wrinkle that might be there. By baptism through faith in Jesus we the shame of the nakedness of our sin is covered by the righteousness of Jesus. In Christ, God does not see our sin but only the righteous, holy, and sinful life of Jesus. Buy this robe, Jesus says.

And rather than the Phrygian eye salve that was produced at the Laodicean medical school, let the Holy Spirit apply the eye salve of the Gospel. The eye salve that gives spiritual sight to the inwardly blind.

These things are only available through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His perfect life as our substitute for sin. His sacrificial death on the cross to atone for our sins. His victorious resurrection on the third day and ascension into heaven. THESE are things that truly matter. The grace of Christ is the only thing that matters in this life. ***“My grace is sufficient for you,”*** Jesus says. (2 Cor 12:9) Only with Jesus Christ and His righteousness can we truly say, “I have need of nothing.”

Let us all examine ourselves and repent of our lukewarm ways. Let us listen to the voice of Jesus as He knocks on the door of our hearts and calls us to repentance. Let us zealously and eagerly pursue that good news of our salvation. May the Holy Spirit help us to overcome a lukewarm faith, that we may sit with Jesus on His throne in heaven, even as Jesus overcame sin, death, and the devil to sit down with His Father on His throne. May God help us! Amen.