

Date: 16.5.21  
 Text: Revelation 3:14-22  
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One of my greatest ever jobs was to be a mystery shopper. For about four years I was employed by Pizza Hut where I had to buy pizza and rate my experience. How was the taste, the value, the service, the delivery? It was a great job. Any job with free pizza is a great job.

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But then I found out that there were not just mystery shoppers but mystery worshippers. People were organized by the shipoffools website to visit churches and rate their experience. What was the welcome like, the comfort of the seats, the music, the preaching, the supper afterwards? What is the church really like? Now I wonder what they would say about us? Have we been friendly to that first timer? Have we been engaged with our singing? Are we ready and waiting to hear God speak to us tonight through His word?

Well in the first century AD they didn't need a mystery worshipper because Jesus himself came among them & wrote a report. And he wasn't really interested in the coffee or the singing he wanted to get to the heart of the issue. And over the last three weeks we have seen his report into the Churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia. And tonight, we come to the last one, Laodicea and the report isn't pretty.

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<sup>14</sup> *"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."* This report is a trustworthy one because it is written by God Himself. His Son Jesus is faithful and true. He isn't going to lie to us. He isn't going to tell us what we want to hear. He will not make the Church seem better than what it is or any worse than what it is. He will give it to us straight. So what does he say about the Church at Laodicea? And what might he say about us?

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In 1986 the Australia government launched its famous Slip. Slop. Slap campaign against skin cancer. Well in about 90 AD Jesus does his own version. A version I am calling Sip. Shop. Sup.

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### 1. Sip (verse 15-16)

<sup>15</sup> *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!"* <sup>16</sup> *So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."*

Now Jesus knows his subject matter because the people of Laodicea had a problem with their water. Nine km to the north is the city of Hierapolis which was famed for its hot, thermal springs. Good for healing of the body. And some 14 kms upriver was the city of Colossae and it was known for its cold, refreshing spring waters. Good for the thirst. But Laodicea had no water supply of its own. So it built an aqueduct from Hierapolis and when the water came to them it was warm and tasteless. It was not good even to sip.

So there's refreshing cold water at Colossae, there's healing hot water at Hierapolis, but at

Laodicea, the water is tepid & putrid. Its too cool to heal & too warm to refresh. Its lukewarm

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Now I think we can relate to that. When we have been out exercising it is great to come home, open the fridge and get a nice cold glass of water. Or if we wake up tired, its great to start the day with a piping hot cup of tea or coffee. But warm water, Uhhh, I hate it. It's useless.

And Jesus is saying that this is true of the Church at Laodicea. It would be great if they were on fire for the Lord. Hot. If they had burning hearts. What great things could be done for the Kingdom. If they were cold hearted, at least they would know that things were not right between them and the Lord. But to be lukewarm. To think that you are rich when you are actually poor. To think you see things correctly when you are actually blind. To think you have got it together and instead have it so, so wrong. That's the worst state you can be in.

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If you are hot you can achieve something. If you are cold well at least you are not under any illusions. But if you think you are hot and you are not. If you think that you are doing a good job and you aren't. If you think you are effective and instead you are destructive, that's the worst of the lot. And Jesus is saying to this Church when I take a sip of the water you are offering others I want to just throw up.

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Your type of Christianity makes me sick. It disgusts me. I can't stand it. In the words of American preacher John MacArthur Jnr *"Some churches make the Lord weep, others make him angry; the Laodicean church made him sick."*

Imagine Jesus preferring a form of cold Christianity, dead Christianity to lukewarm Christianity? But think about it. If water is left to itself that's what it becomes lukewarm. You take water from a cool refreshing stream and leave it out in the sun for a couple of hours and removed from the source, it becomes undrinkable. And if you take water out of a hot spring and leave it by itself for a few hours, it will becomes just as bad.

Remove the water from its source and it becomes useless. And take a Church away from the source of its life, Jesus Christ and it too becomes useless. Let a Church just sing songs but not have good words. Let them read the Bible but never let the Bible change them. Let the people come to Church but never come to God to worship & it becomes useless. Tasteless & Jesus looks down at it & says, you make me sick. Looking at you makes me want to puke!

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So I wonder what Jesus would say to us this evening. You guys are on fire, keep it up? Or would he say you once were on fire but you have got comfortable and lost your heat. Wake up to yourselves and come back to me. Or would he say to us you think you have got right. You have good music, a good group of young people and you enjoy your time together but really you are lukewarm. Where's your evangelism? Where's your service? Where's your care for the poor and the sick and the imprisoned? Where are you actually relying on Christ rather than just on your own abilities? Which is why Jesus turns from the sip, to the shop.

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## 2. Shop (verses 17-18)

Now I believe that for just \$150 you can book a one on one session with Charlestown Square

resident stylist Natalie Baker. Now that's another job I used to do, a clothes stylist! Only joking! Natalie will work out your own individual style and take you shopping and in a few hours you can get exactly what you need. Well Jesus says to the Church of Laodicea you think you are rich and stylish and with good vision? Actually you are poor, blind and naked. And so he says not just shop with me but come shop and buy from me.

*<sup>17</sup>"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. <sup>18</sup>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."*

Once again Jesus knows the people of Laodicea to a T. The town was a centre of finance and so there was a lot of rich people there. People who didn't need anyone else but themselves. It was known for its clothing especially its tunics made from the locally sourced black wool. And it was a medical centre famous for its powder that helped eyesight and hearing. Jesus knows the town and says to the Church of that town you are known for your riches but you are actually poor. But if you come and shop from me you can buy pure gold, real riches.

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A few years before in the 60's an earthquake destroyed the city of Laodicea and it was offered Roman assistance. And it said no! No to other people's money. "I am alright. I can do this, they said. I don't need anyone else help. And that sort of attitude is dangerous in the Church. I don't need God's help. I don't need to pray. I don't need his word, his spirit. I've got this. I'm alright. And Jesus says that is why you are poor. But come shop from me for I am offering you the riches of heaven, the riches of God Himself. Things that will never perish, spoil or fade. Come buy from me and you will be not just physically rich but spiritually rich.

And buy from me not black tunics but white robes. You think you are dressed to the nines with that little black cocktail dress with your high heels, but the height of eternal fashion is not being clothed in your own good deeds but being clothed in the righteousness of Christ. I will help you clothe yourself in purity, in love, in kindness and in gentleness. I will make you holy. You think you look good, but your pride and self sufficiency has made you naked.

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Remember Hans Christian Anderson's fable of Emperor's New Clothes? How the Emperor thought he had been outfitted in the finest ever clothes, but he was actually naked? But everyone went on not wanting to point out the obvious to him. Until a young boy pipes up and says, "the emperor has no clothes".

Well Jesus is saying to the Church at Laodicea you have no clothes! You think you look good, but you don't. You think you have it all together, but you are lukewarm. And I want to spit you out of my mouth. And you think you can see, you can see what is right and wrong and you can see the faults in everyone else but you are not just poor and naked but also blind.

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In 1589, Galileo summoned learned professors to the base of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Then he went to the top and at the exact same time he pushed off a ten-pound and a one-pound weight. Both landed at the same instant. The power of belief was so strong, however, that the professors denied their eyesight. They continued to say Aristotle was right that the

heavier an object the faster it drops to earth. It is amazing how one can look truth in the face & still deny it. There is an old proverb "There is none so blind as he who will not see."

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Someone once asked Helen Keller, who had been blind since the age of nineteen months, if blindness was the worst thing that could befall a person. She answered that the worst thing that could befall a person was not to lose their sight but to lose their vision. And the Church of Laodicea has lost its vision. It is meant to be shedding God's light to the world and instead it is offering them a lukewarm glass of water. It is meant to be pointing others to the riches of a relationship with God and instead it is modelling the poorness of being away from God.

And Jesus is saying to them come shopping with me and I will give you eye drops so you can truly see. I will give you're the riches of being a son or daughter of God. I will clothe you with my very own righteousness. You want to do it all by yourselves and it just won't work. But if you shop with me, shop from me you will get all you want and need.

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Sunday @ 6 don't just look after number one. Don't believe in yourself. Don't pull yourself together. Don't just rely on yourself. Instead in the words of Isaiah 55, "*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.<sup>2</sup> Why spend money on what is not bread, & your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, & you will delight in the richest of fare.*"

When you shop with Jesus he offers you the perfect gift. Himself. He is the gold that will make the Church rich. His are the clothes that will cover us up our sinful lifestyle. He will give people the vision to know what is truly going on in the world.

What they truly need is Jesus. And what we need is Jesus as well. So often we think we have it all together and quite simply we don't. We think we look good and Jesus sees through our outward appearances and see our hearts. We think we see the future but we fail to see that 80% of the world's population live on a few dollars a day. We fail to see the 50 million refugees scattered throughout the world. And we fail to see that the vast majority of the people of the world have not yet trusted in Jesus and so will end up in hell. Much of the church today is blind. Blind to the things of God. Blind to the heart of God.

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So do you see what Jesus is saying to the Church of Laodicea and to our Church and to us? Don't be lukewarm. Don't just trust in yourselves. Come to Jesus. Jesus has taken a sip of the Church, he is inviting them to shop with him and lastly he wants to come in &

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### **3. Sup (verses 19-20)**

He wants to eat with you. Now you think he would have had enough of the hypocrisy of the Church at Laodicea. Out of the 7 Churches of Revelation 2 & 3 this Church seems to be the worst. He has nothing good to say about them. They obviously are in a bad spot. But it's not too late for them. Jesus still reaches out to them with the hand of mercy. There is still a chance. <sup>19</sup>"*Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.*"

The fact that Jesus is rebuking them is a sure sign that he still loves them. Jesus hasn't walked away from them. Jesus hasn't forgotten them. Jesus hasn't said that there is now no

hope for them. For <sup>20</sup> *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.*"

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Now there has been many an evangelistic sermon based on this verse. Jesus is standing at the door of your heart, Knocking. And all you have to do is open yourself up to him and let him in. So why don't you let him in? You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. You will receive riches and vision and security and eternity with him. Let him in. He wants you. He wants to spend eternity with you. He wants to make sure you are never alone.

And there is some truth to that. We do need to respond to Jesus. We do need to repent and believe. We do need to acknowledge that without him we can do nothing. Absolutely nothing. But Jesus isn't stuck on the other side of the door as if there is only one handle and its on our side. This is the Jesus of Revelation 1 after all, who is in complete control of the whole world. Who sees everything; whose speech is like a double edged sword and who makes Arnold Schwarzenegger look like a complete wimp.

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And this Jesus is knocking on the door of our lives even now. In the words of Scottish preacher Robert M'Cheyne *"Jesus has been long standing at the door of your hearts and He knocks at it in the Bible – every time you read it, that is Christ knocking; and He knocks at the your door by godly friends, by godly parents and He knocks by the words of ministers ... and Christ knocks by providences that have met you in your family, by lost friends, even the ones taken away from you. And you thought it was a rude hand, but it was Christs. It was Christ who wants to reveal himself to you, who wants to be a Saviour to you; it was Christ who wants to be revealed in you... And he has knocked at your hearts in these seven letters, the Lord has been in this place although you knew it not; He has stood until His head is filled with dew and his locks with the drops of the night He has pleaded by His blood and by His tears. Now if you would hear Christ's voice and open the door what does the Lord Jesus say He would do? 'I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me.'*"

But remember this is written primarily to a Church, the Church of Laodicea and it seems the Church has closed the door to Jesus. The Church is carrying on as if Jesus was outside, away from all its activities. There is no prayer to Jesus. There is no trust in Jesus. There is no following of Jesus. But there is still hope, even now. The half-hearted Church can respond with full blown repentance. The biggest rebuke can become the biggest reward.

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<sup>21</sup> *"To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* The best thing ever is reserved to those who hear and respond to what the Spirit is saying to them. They will have a place on the throne of Christ, the King of kings & Lord of lords. They will rule with Christ. They will get the riches of God's glory set aside for them in a new heaven and a new earth. That's ours if we overcome.

Slide 21

One of the greatest of all the Olympic stories is what happened in Mexico in 1968 during the last race, the marathon. There was a runner John Akhwari from Tanzania who fell badly half way through the race. He dislocated his knee, badly gashed his calf but he kept going and going and going. By the time he reached the stadium the race had long finished and many of the spectators had headed home, even many of the officials had packed up for the day.

At last Akhwari crossed the finish line, he limped off the track and collapsed. The next day he was interviewed by the world's media and they asked him why didn't he stop? And he replied "My country did not send me 7000 miles here to Mexico City to start the race. My country sent me here to finish the race."

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Friends God did not send us into this world to give up. He wants us to overcome. To finish the race. Not to be lukewarm but to be on fire for the Lord right until the very end. He wants us to see what our world truly needs. He wants us to remember what our calling really is. And he wants to join us in this task and eventually he wants us to join him in the eternity he has prepared for his people.

And so it is not like we have had a mystery worshipper with us tonight but we have had the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He has sipped our water tonight. He has offered to go shopping with us tonight and he is wants to eat with, to sup with us tonight. And every night. And he is has sent us all a tweet #lukewarm #Jesusisknocking. He has cced us into the email he has sent to the Church at Laodicea. He has written us a personal text. Actually Jesus is knocking on the door through his word. And he is saying to us "*If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*"

Let's Pray...

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I have some homework for you tonight. I want you to write for me an 8<sup>th</sup> letter. To the Church of Charlestown Presbyterian. If Jesus was writing to us, what would he say to us tonight? What would he commend us for? What would he condemn us for? What aspect of his character would he highlight and what promise would he leave us with? Text them to me. Email them to me. Carrier pigeon them to me. I would love to hear what you think.