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Scripture: A Message to the Church-Laodicea

Did everyone have their coffee this morning? Unfortunately, I can't have caffeine because of a little stomach issue but my daily routine is two cups of decaf coffee every morning. Even though it's lacking the super charge, there is something about it that still gets me going.

A recent report on our culture's coffee consumption habits reveal that we are one very caffeinated society. There is a Starbucks, Tim Horton's or any number of other local coffee shops on every corner but here is the interesting thing. Over half of the coffee now consumed daily is classified as "gourmet" or specialty coffee. I remember as a kid going to my Grandma's house and seeing the container of Camp's Coffee. Does anyone remember Camp's Coffee? A container of dark, coffee flavoured syrup you would pour into hot water to make coffee in the day. I think they still sell it. As a teenager, I used to make my parents coffee by measuring a scoop of Taster's Choice, instant coffee, made up of dissolvable crystals and pouring in hot water. Today, the choices are unlimited. You can go to Starbucks and order any number of specialty coffee concoctions. Hot or Cold. You can go to the grocery store and pick up dark roast, medium roast, breakfast blend or for your Keurig there's French vanilla, Hazelnut, caramel and list goes on.

If George Clooney has wooed you over to a Nespresso, then you know you are part of an exclusive coffee club and can select your specially brewed sleeves of coffee pods on-line. My wife Carolyn never drank coffee until last year when someone gave her one that was chocolate raspberry flavoured. Now she has a cup of flavoured coffee every day.

It seems that younger people are driving this trend towards gourmet coffee. I know on the North Park staff, we have Josh Black, Jordan Elgie and Steve

McDouell who are coffee aficionados. In fact, a couple of weeks ago, this machine ended up in our staff kitchen. An espresso machine, I am told it is espresso not expresso. It is very important to know the difference! This machine was purchased to be used at various activities around North Park to improve our overall coffee game and you can imagine our staff has had a great time trying it out over the past few weeks. I can't tell you how many times I have walked into the kitchen and found Josh giving tutorials on how to use the machine or crafting some specialty coffee for taste testing. Now from what I have seen and heard, I have come to the conclusion that it is this little arm here that is the most important part of the machine. Oh, you have to grind the coffee and brew it through the other part of the machine but this arm is where all the magic happens.

This is how it works. You pour milk in a cup and then put it under the arm and push the knob down and it injects steam into the milk which causes it to foam and heat up. Then you pour it into the brewed coffee and it turns it into a lovely, foamy, steaming latte. The key is to have the milk heated to the proper temperature. Without the heat, you are left with a bland, lukewarm drink. Have you ever had a coffee and then left it to do something and came back to it and took a sip. Yuck! Hot coffee is good. Cold coffee, especially an iced coffee you get at Starbucks is tasty, but room temperature, lukewarm coffee is disgusting. Would you agree?

That is our theme for today. Being lukewarm. If you have been with us over the past few weeks, you know that we are in a message series on Jesus' letters to his churches found in the book of Revelation. They are intimate caring letters from Jesus to these churches that he loves. He wants the very best for his people but also doesn't pull any punches, the stakes are too high. He doesn't want anything to get in the way of them truly living the kind of lives that he intends for

them and shining his light into the cities where they have been placed. Remember, these letters were written around 96 AD. Christians and the Christian church were experiencing incredible persecution at the hands of the Romans led by the emperor at the time, Domitian. The Apostle John, Jesus' beloved disciple was in his mid-eighties and was in exile on the prison island of Patmos. He was banished there because he refused to bow down and worship Domitian as Lord and God. We are told in the text that John was worshipping the Lord one day when Jesus gives him a revelation. It is like Jesus pulls back a curtain and gives John a powerful vision of who he is and in Revelation 1, he tells John to write down the things that he sees and hears. Jesus has some words of encouragement and challenge for his churches in these difficult times that he wants John to relay to them.

To the church at Ephesus, he writes, there are some good things happening but I have this complaint against you, you have forgotten your first love, Me.

To the church at Pergamum, he writes a letter to encourage them to stand firm against false teaching and idolatry.

To the church at Sardis, Jesus is more blunt. You're dead, he tells them. But hope was not lost. Jesus revives them with five urgent commands to bring them back to life.

To the church at Philadelphia, Jesus has no complaint against them but encourages them to walk through the door that he has opened for them and to continue to build their lives on him.

Today, we come to the last of the seven letters that Jesus dictates and it is to the church at Laodicea. Let me read it to you and then we will take a closer look at the content.

If you have your bibles, turn with me to Revelation 3:14-22. As I read it, put yourself in the place of this Laodicean church. What do you hear Jesus saying to you?

Revelation 3:14-22

"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true

witness, the beginning of God's new creation:

15 "I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!

17 You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. 18 So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see.

19 I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference.

20 "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. 21 Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.

22 "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches."

The last of Jesus' seven letters is the hardest hitting. Not once in this letter does Jesus commend the Laodicea church for anything. He cannot find anything good in them. Can you imagine what an indictment that would be? Can you imagine Jesus coming and walking among us and not finding one single positive thing to say about anything we are doing? That would be a little soul crushing. It would be a little deflating to say the least. Have you ever been in a situation like this? Someone comes in and looks around at something that you have been doing and just cuts it and you to shreds. That messes with your confidence and self-esteem.

This letter also includes one of the most gracious invitations from Jesus. He expresses his displeasure with the Laodicean church but then offers an incredible blessing. It is important to notice the beginning of this message from Jesus. In most of the other letters, Jesus begins by telling them what he does or has, but in this letter, he tells the Laodicean church who he is.

Revelation 3:14

This is the message from the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation:

Jesus is the Amen. Now for us, amen simply means the dot or the period at the end of a prayer. I am finished now, so, Amen. For those in Jesus’ time, to say amen was a way of acknowledging that something was valid and binding. It was utterly trustworthy and a foundation upon which to build. Trish did a great job of explaining this concept of Amen when we were in our Lord’s prayer series. This is what Jesus is declaring to the Laodicean Church in the opening of his letter to them. I am the Amen. He is trustworthy and true and the foundation of life but he goes further, I am the beginning of God’s new creation. The actual word that Jesus would have used here for beginning is arche. It is the same word that God uses to describe himself in

Revelation 21:6

I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End.

The word beginning here is arche. Arche means beginning not just in the sense of being first in the sequence of events like the opening or beginning of a story, Once upon a time there was a girl. Arche also means the source or origin of something. By using this word arche/beginning, Jesus is reminding the Laodiceans and us, that all of God’s creation has its origin and purpose in him. His resurrection marked the new beginning of creation and everything in the universe has the stamp of Jesus on it. He is the amen. The faithful and true. The beginning and origin of everything. His stamp is on all creation and that is what makes what he says next to the Laodiceans so devastating.

Revelation 3:15-16

“I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!”

I know the things you do, Jesus says. I have been watching you. I have noticed. He then goes on to use this metaphor about hot, cold and lukewarm water. Surely he doesn’t just pull this out of the blue. No. If

you have been paying attention to all the other letters that Jesus wrote to his churches, you know that he used examples and analogies that they would have understood given their particular context and culture. He does a similar thing in this letter to the Laodiceans.

Here is what you need to know about this ancient city to understand what Jesus may be getting at here with the hot, cold, lukewarm water comparison. Laodicea was located in the Lycus River Valley with the cities of Hierapolis and Colossae close by. Laodicea was a highly commercial and wealthy city with many banks and commerce. It was also a major manufacturing centre for clothing, using a particular wool from a breed of sheep found only in this area. Laodicea was also famous for a medical school that produced a type of eye salve that help those with poor vision.

For all of their benefits as a city, Laodicea has one major downfall. They had an inadequate water supply. They lacked a local, natural source of water. They received their water through an aqueduct system of stone pipes coming from a spring almost 7 kilometres away. By the time the water got to the city it had lost its freshness and taste. It was lukewarm. Now contrast that with only ten kilometers away, the city of Hierapolis was famous for their hot springs and their medicinal qualities. Another 12 km or so in the other direction was the city of Colossae. It was known for the ice cold springs located close by. Hot or cold. Jesus is saying that both of these conditions are good when referring to water. Hierapolis had hot healing water, Colossae cold refreshing water, both are useful but Laodicea had lukewarm water and it was so distasteful that you just want to spit it out.

The way that Jesus is describing the church at Laodicea;

Revelation 3:15-16

“I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!”

This would have struck a chord with the Laodiceans because of their experience with their own water.

They knew what Jesus was getting at but to have the activities of their church described like this, lukewarm; this was the worst indictment.

In fact, look at Jesus's words, I will spit you out of my mouth! The English word here, spit, does not do justice to how Jesus really felt. In the original language, Jesus' words are translated even cruder, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth. We use the expression, I just threw up a little in my mouth, in our society today. Usually, it is used to describe our disgust at something. Can you imagine Jesus looking over our church, our attitudes and activities and saying, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth!

Jesus, the Amen, the firm foundation, the beginning, the arche, whose stamp is on all creation is disgusted by lukewarm. He is nauseated by tepidness to the point of wanting to throw up.

This is the condition that plagued the church at Laodicea, lukewarm. When it came to Jesus, all they could generate was mild approval. Notice Jesus' complaint is not about the programs they are running or even their theology. He is not concerned about their choice of worship songs, preaching texts or even their morality. It's just that there is no enthusiasm. Oh, they had faith but with no conviction. Faith with no passion for the one who saved them. For the one who is the Amen. For the one who is the beginning and the source of all things. Their lives were not reflective of gratitude and praise for the one who gave them his life, so that they could have life eternal. Can you imagine? And it made Jesus sick. Sick. I know your deeds, he says. Oh you carve out some time maybe once a week to come to my house and even at that, your late most of the time. You apathetically sing songs to me if you can even muster up the energy to sing at all. If you happen to have any money left over after you have spent it all on yourself, you resentfully throw a little something in the offering plate and then you go back to living your life like I don't even exist at all.

Hot or cold. It would be good if you were one of the other, but you are neither, Jesus says. The church at Laodicea was not providing cool refreshment for the spiritually weary or warm healing for the spiritually sick. All they could generate was mild approval. Apathy. Unfortunately, this seems to be a condition that is plaguing much of the North American church and Christians today, would you agree? A recent

study looking at apathy in the Canadian church listed these telltale signs of a lukewarm church.

1. A decline in attendance at worship services.
2. A lack of concern for outreach into the community.
3. A lack of participation in congregation singing.
4. An indifference to the needs of others.
5. A lack of encouragement for pastors.
6. A failure to invest in the spiritual lives of the next generation.

An article posted on the CBC web site this week stated that Canada is set to lose 9 000 churches in the coming years and one of the predominant reasons is because of aging populations that cannot sustain the church any longer. There has been a failure or neglect to invest in the spiritual lives of the next generation and as a result, churches are dying. Churches are folding. The core problem with Christian apathy, the thing that makes it so serious is the very thing that we are apathetic about, Jesus.

There is an enormous disparity between the glory, wonder, awesomeness of Christ and our society's bored, indifferent "whatever" responses to him. Being lukewarm is a problem because it misses the whole point of Christianity. That is, the awesomeness of Christ and that he has given us the greatest news possible. That we are saved! That is news we should be shouting from the mountain tops.

Our God is the lion, the lion of Judah. He's roaring with power and fighting our battles. And every knee will bow before you. Our God is the lamb, the lamb that was slain. For the sins of the world, his blood breaks the chains. And every knee will bow before the lion and the lamb. Oh every knee will bow before him

Is this the cry of the church today to a needy world? Is it our cry? Not just on Sundays! Can you see now why Jesus was so disgusted with the Laodicean church? Look as the letter continues,

Revelation 3:17, Jesus says to them.

You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

I don't need a thing!' Those are dangerous words. Do you remember the message series we did last year,

The Story? As we went through the entire biblical narrative and God's history with his people, we found that when they were in the most trouble was when they said to God, I don't need a thing. When they turned their backs on God and went their own way. It was self-sufficiency. We know where this attitude got them don't we?

That's what much of the Old Testament is about. When left to their own devices, the people of God, the Israelites got themselves in trouble and end up crying out to God for help and he saves them, time after time. Never are we in more trouble in our lives than when we declared, I don't need a thing. With that cry we are proclaiming, I can do it myself. I don't need you right now God. That is what got humanity in trouble in the very beginning, when Adam and Eve thought they knew more than God and went solo on a decision to eat from a certain tree. Have you ever said to God, I don't need a thing? I've got this God, you can take a break? How did that work out for you? I don't need a thing. That may have just been the motto of the city of Laodicea.

Remember this was a city that was wealthy with its many banks and commercial trade. It had a renowned medical school famous for its eye salve that was believed to heal weak and failing eyes and its clothing industry exported woolen garments all around the Middle Eastern world at the time.

Wealth. Medicine. Clothing. They had it all or so it seemed. The city prided itself on having everything they needed to be self-sufficient and the church had bought into that same mindset. The church at Laodicea was not separate from the culture of the city. It was drinking the same water tap, literally and metaphorically. They were apathetically going through the motions in their faith, lukewarm but really they were self-sufficient. They didn't need God because their momentary needs were being met. But as Jesus has done in all of the letters to this point, he spins that around. Look again at what Jesus says in the text. You think you have wealth because of your banks and industries but really you are poor. You think you can see because of your famous eye salve but really you are blind.

You think you are clothed with your fancy woolen garments but really you are naked. Without me, you are wretched fools, poor and blind and naked.

This is a good reminder when we are tempted to lean on our own strength and abilities such as our intelligence, material resources or even good looks. You are poor and blind and naked without me, Jesus says.

What a hopeless situation the church at Laodicea finds itself in. But if we have learned anything from these letters Jesus wrote to his churches, there is always hope. Hope comes by repenting and turning back to him. Did you notice that Jesus doesn't move away from them? It is not like they have to chase him down. Wait, Jesus. We're sorry. No, Jesus actually moves towards this wretched church. He doesn't want them to remain in their present condition.

His choice of words in Revelation 3:18 is interesting. There is a note of irony. He says to the Laodiceans, So I advise you to buy gold from me— buy from me. He is using words that these materialistic minded Laodiceans would understand. Buy from me gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see.

Buy gold from me, then you will not be poor,
Buy whites garments from me, then you will not be naked

Buy ointment for your eyes from me, they you will not be blind.

Buy from me, Jesus says to this church but it is not a monetary transaction. In the Kingdom of God, it is an exchange of his grace for our junk/baggage.

Jesus is so nauseated by this church's lukewarmness and wants to vomit them out of his mouth like a tepid cup of coffee but what does he do instead? The Great Amen. The one who is trustworthy and true. The arche. The beginning and source of all things and who's stamp is on every living thing. What does he do? He offers them and us, his grace and his compassion. Come to me, buy from me, he says. Don't buy that bill of goods the world is offering. Why does he do this? He answers that question in the very next verse.

Revelation 3:19

I correct and discipline everyone I love

Jesus offers 2nd, 3rd, ten chances because he loves us.

Revelation 3:19

I correct and discipline everyone I love.

So be diligent and turn from your indifference. In other words, repent. Turn from the way you have been going which only leads to death and turn back to me, the way that leads to life. Do you remember at the beginning of this message, I said that this letter from Jesus is one of the hardest hitting of the seven letters he wrote to his churches? I know the things you do and I want to vomit you out of my mouth. That is pretty hard hitting.

But I also said that this letter also includes one of the most gracious invitations from Jesus. In Revelation 3:20, even after their lukewarm attitude towards him, Jesus stills says this to them,

Revelation 3:20-21

“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. 21 Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.

Does this passage sound familiar to some of you? It is a well-known and well used passage but most of the time, we use it in the context of inviting people to make a first time commitment to follow Jesus. Open the door, he is knocking. Let him in.

That is not the context of this at all. Jesus is not speaking to unbelievers here. He is speaking to his church. Those who are already Christians or at least think they are. Those who think they have it all together. Look, he says. This is an emphatic command. Look!! I am standing at the door. There is that door metaphor again from last week. I am right here Jesus says. I have all you need. Will you let me in? This door that Jesus is knocking on only had an inside door knob and it only opens one way, inwards. It is our choice whether we open it or not. He is on the outside and wants to come in. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in. Jesus doesn't ordinarily kick the door down like we see in the heroes do in the movies. Sometimes we wish he would but most of the time he just knocks. Will we open the door?

Do you know the root cause for being lukewarm? It is caused by excluding Jesus from our lives and from the life of the church. He is like that arm from the espresso machine that gives us the heat and the steam. He is what gives us the fire. Without him, lukewarm, mild approval is as good as it gets.

Is that the way you are feeling today, lukewarm and apathetic toward God? The solution is not more self-sufficiency, the solution is not to try harder, the solution is, to open the door!

On the outside, the Laodicean church had all the appearances of being an active church but they had shut Jesus out. They had slammed the door on him and as a result the fire is gone. Without him, the cool refreshment has grown stale. Let me in, Jesus says, and we will share a meal together as friends. This is a wonderful promise. Do you remember our Table Talk series from the summer? To share a meal with someone in the culture of Jesus' day was to share a life with them. It was to bind your life together with that person's life.

That is what Jesus desires for the Laodicean church, and for us and for this church. That we would open the door, let him in and then bind our lives with him. Then we will be seated on the throne with him, sit with me on my throne.

So, where does this message find you today? Maybe you have never turned the door handle and invited Jesus into your life. But you know that You are spiritually poor and blind and naked without him. You know you need what Jesus has to offer. Open the door. He is knocking. If you open it, he will come in.

Maybe you opened the door of your life to Jesus years ago but for whatever reason, you know that you have slowly excluded him. That is why you feel so stale, so empty and dry. Welcome him back in today. Open the door and he will come in again. Or maybe you know that you have opened the door and let Jesus into one part of your life but have excluded him from others. You have slammed those doors shut in his face but something doesn't feel right. It isn't.

The Great Amen, the beginning, the arche wants into your entire life. Will you invite him into your family, your finances, your school, your workplace, your

neighbourhood? As strange as it sounds, will we let him into this church?

There is only one remedy for being spiritually lukewarm. Open the door and admit or re-admit Jesus. “Look! I stand at the door and knock, he says. Will you, will we turn the handle and let him in, so that he will light or relight his fire in us?”

Amen. Amen.

Points to Ponder

A Message to the Church

Lukewarm

Revelation 3:14-22 ~ Laodicea

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Discuss this concept of lukewarm. What are some things that are distasteful if they are lukewarm? What is it that makes them so unsavory?
2. What does it mean to you that Jesus is the “Amen, the one who is faithful and true”? What does it mean to you that he is the beginning, the source of new life and his stamp is on everything?
3. Think back on your week. Jesus says, *I know the things you do*, **Revelation 3:15**. Based on your activities, how do you think Jesus would label you; hot, cold or lukewarm? Why? Think of the life and activity of North Park Church. How do you think Jesus would label our church; hot, cold or lukewarm? Why?
4. Signs of spiritual apathy in a church are; decline in attendance, lack of concern for the community, lack of participation in congregational singing, an indifference to the needs of others, a lack of encouragement for pastors, a failure to invest in the spiritual lives of the next generation. Discuss these

signs and how they relate to what you observe at North Park Church.

5. Most of us live in a city, London that is for the most part, prosperous. We have excellent post-secondary education institutions, thriving businesses and renown hospitals and health care. Discuss whether you think there is a temptation in our culture to become self-sufficient and say to God, “I don’t need a thing” rather than being fully dependent on God.
6. In **Revelation 3:20**, Jesus says, *Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in*, Have you opened the door to Jesus? Have you opened it in all areas of your life? If not, what is holding you back?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray for those who may confess to feeling lukewarm these days. Pray that they will open the door of their life and invite Jesus to come in and light the fire for him again.