



**Date:** March 23-24, 2019

**Speaker:** Matt Eckert, Executive Lead Pastor

**Scripture:** A Message to the Church-North Park

Let me ask you a question. How do you take feedback? How good are you at receiving feedback? When your friend comes to you and wants to give you insight into your life how well do you take it? How would your spouse or your kids say you take feedback? I suppose the answer for all of us would be it depends. Right. It depends. It might depend on who is giving the feedback. Certain people you just don't want to listen to do you? In fact probably certain people if they phone you or they send you an e-mail you know exactly what you're getting right and you want to send it right to the trash box. Depends on who perhaps or the history of the feedback you've received from somebody that may determine it. It might be where you get the feedback. If it's done confidentially privately maybe you'll accept it versus if someone wants to give you feedback in front of all kinds of people it may be a little harder to take. Perhaps it's the topic of the feedback. Certain areas you can gladly accept and take in. But there's some things that you believe you don't need any feedback for. And how dare someone try to influence your life and give you feedback or maybe it's just your mood. How you feel how the day went. It depends right on how we receive feedback.

I recall going out for dinner with a friend a couple of years back and having a good conversation and I said some things that he was insulted by and so he gave me feedback, real time right in the moment. I remember thinking to myself inside how dare he. Friends don't. Hold on a second this is exactly what friends do. Right friends do give us feedback. We were able to talk some things through and I was able to understand what was taking place. Feedback is so important isn't it?

I'm putting myself through what's known as a 360 degree feedback review of my work here at North Park. I've done this on a couple of other occasions

and I think it's important at times to take a step back. I've asked 20 different people to rate how I'm doing in different areas of my leading here. They're going to give me some feedback. I recall the very first time I did this. It was I think back in 2009. I remember receiving this 40 page document because people don't only rate you like one to 10 but they actually can write their comments and they wrote a lot of comments. A lot of it was positive. It was encouraging but there were these pieces that they felt empowered to give me some feedback. I remember the first two days after receiving that I kind of went into a bit of a depression. What's going on? They hate me.

The reality is I knew they liked me and I liked them. They just finally had a means by which they wanted to give me some feedback to let me see some areas of my life that I need to know about. The feedback is so important isn't it? How well are you are receiving feedback?

We've been on this amazing journey these last five weeks. We've been looking at this book the very last book in the New Testament the second half of the Bible called the Revelation. There's these beautiful letters at the very beginning of this book and they are providing feedback. Through John Jesus is speaking. He wants to talk to these churches and give them some feedback. We have these amazing props haven't we during our time. The door and how the churches are referred to as these lights and the medical robe that pastor Paul wore for the one message. They are all here to remind us as to what's going on. You may recall the story. John was actually exiled to the island of Patmos. Domitian wanted to get rid of him. He was causing all kinds of issues but he felt that killing him would have made a martyr out of him and could have had some uprising so that wouldn't work. So he just exiled him to this island of Patmos hoping that he would

just fade into the history of the people and he could finally get rid of him. John was about 80 years old when he was in this time and he sensed Jesus himself speaking to him and saying write these things down. There were these seven churches Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. He was exiled to the island of Patmos. He had this letter that somehow he was able to get and circulate to these churches because Jesus wants to provide them with feedback.

It's so important to recognize as you read the book of Revelation that it's from the heart of a pastor who wants to speak to these churches and let them know some things about what is to come and what their lives are like right now.

You recall when Pastor Paul introduced Revelation. He said this kind of writing is apocalyptic writing. It's all about the unveiling or the pulling back of the curtain to the breaking through to a lot of revelation about Jesus. Through John it reveals what is to take place but in many ways when he writes these letters he's opening up a box and exposing these churches to things that they were missing. He wanted to make them aware of these things. It was the unveiling.

So what I simply want to do this morning is to reflect on those five letters as we close our series. Here's what I also know. You see all feedback requires a response. Feedback requires a response. We do not know how these churches responded to this feedback but as I walked through these pieces at the end of the service I'm going to ask you to respond. In your bulletins when you came in you would have received a sheet like this. If you want you can pull it out already because you may want to be jotting down a few comments or notes as we go through this message. Here's what I want you to do as you take your notes. At the end of the message I'm going to ask you to respond. What is God asking of you from this feedback. I'm going to have you write it down at the bottom. You can simply tear this off and I'm going to ask you to come and bring it forward. Last night many people came forward and wrote their thoughts down. I've read a bunch these last night some beautiful pieces. God was doing an incredible work in people's lives. I'm going to ask the same of you this morning. Will you come forward and respond to this feedback we've been receiving these last five weeks from these five

letters. Here's what to ask as you ponder this. I know somebody right away will say, I think this is going to be easy. I never come forward for anything. Can I ask something of you will you suspend any thinking right now. Will you suspend any response for now? Will you just allow God to speak. Would you not think about what your spouse might think or your friends might think or what awkward conversation you think you'll have to have after if you come forward. But you would just simply allow God to speak to you as only he can and be ready and willing to respond after the service to what God has for you. I know that feedback requires response. What will your response be this morning? So let's work our way through it briefly. These five letters are reminders for you, so if you weren't here hopefully I'll tell you enough so you'll understand what's going on.

I did an amazing thing this past week on Tuesday afternoon. I sat down at my house and I watched all five sermons back to back, two and a half hours of messages in a three and a half hour period. It was amazing to see the themes as I watched this entire series in one sitting. It brought some amazing pieces to my own life and what I need to be reflecting on. Here are the messages in a brief form. Let's see what it triggers for you.

We began with a church in Ephesus. It was probably the church that was nearest geographically so they wrote this letter first. You recall Pastor Paul saying, the key message in this book of Ephesus was, you lost your first love. You're bored you're taking faith for granted. What happened to you? Recall what it was like at one time? Somehow you've lost it. The passion is no longer there. What happened to you? As Pastor Paul was sharing this letter he mentioned there are these three points. He told the churches, he talked with them and said you got to do three things. First of all remember the beginning. If you think about your own faith journey you remember the beginning. You remember those times when you perhaps couldn't read the Bible long enough, you couldn't pray long enough, you couldn't gather with Christian friends enough. There was something about you, it was amazing. Pastor Paul mentioned if you've been dating or married you recognize this. You've lived through this piece. He shared his beautiful poetry with us. Roses are red. Carolyn I are brown... He's

got I think, a poetry book coming out in the next few months. It's going to publish all the best from Paul when he was 18. He said remember the crazy things you used to do. Like nothing got in your way.

He wants in this letter, to remind the church to remember when you had such a love for Christ you couldn't get enough of him and now what happened. You've lost your first love. Then he says repent. Repent simply means turn around. See if this over here was your first love and you've walked away from your first love you're going in the opposite direction. Turn around look back. Remember what it was like. Remember, and then start to redo what you did. Those activities those rhythms start to walk them back to what first love was like.

Jan and I follow a marriage research in the US. His last name is Gottman. He has a great blog. He once asked the question, can any marriage be saved? And his response was fascinating. He said I take people back to the very beginning and he says if there is even one smile. One smile of something they did back then. If they remembered something crazy they did or an event they went to or a song they sang, whatever it was there's one thing, he said one little flame. He says Yeah. He says I think you can then take that marriage and walk that back. From that first love you can restore anything. Here is the church and offices that had lost their first love. Do you remember your first love? Do you remember loving Christ in such an amazing and beautiful way? Have you lost that first love? Does it no longer resonate? Is it no longer vibrant? Is Jesus just emotions? Emotions you go through but the passion is gone?

Well let's go to this second letter and that's to the church in Pergamum. Pastor Shane shared these thoughts. I know where you live, he said. Zeus is on this hill. Here's a picture of the book on a Google Maps trip and here's the picture he showed us. This was the hill overlooking Pergamum. It was this place of worship that Zeus the god himself was. They would worship him there. Jesus through John said, I know where you guys live. I know the pressures of culture on you, that are pounding down on you and here's your little church doing the best you can. But all of society around you is running a different direction so I know what you're going through. Don't think I'm blind to this. He says that

you guys are stronger than that but, you've been on the slow and seductive decline in your faith, just piece by piece you've become distracted by culture. You've lost your focus on God. It just happens a bit at a time doesn't it?

If I may use the example of marriage again, people sometimes come to our offices and they say my marriage just fell apart. No marriage ever just falls apart. Eight years ago it started and you used to go out once a week and then every other week and then you used to talk and then you just got busier and work. Slowly but surely an inch a day an inch a day. Then eight years later the elastic gets stretched so far it just snaps and you think your marriage just fell apart. But in reality it fell apart eight years ago when you started losing an inch a day. You got seduced by other things and you lost your first love.

As a pastor who's been here 15 years now I have had a chance to oversee and watch families and people in this church. I can tell you there are these trends. They used to be committed and they used to be here every single week. It was part of your rhythms of life. Then other things were there and other activities. You know once every two months we'll miss it because you know other things go on. They're kind of fun things. These aren't necessarily bad things. Then you know once a month we just can't show up anymore and then every other week we can show up and you watch the slow change. Someone who used to engage in spiritual practices and a morning devotional time and a prayer time was so amazing or involved in a small group and all of sudden you get a different job. It starts to take you away and everyone at work just validates you. It's so exciting and what used to be a regular morning rhythm now becomes every other morning and then becomes every third morning and once a week and before you know it you haven't cracked your Bible open for three months. Because there's so much else going on right. The culture is so beautiful and there's so many things to engage in. You know truly God understands right. This is slow and seductive decline in your faith.

Well the third city was Sardis. You are dead. It is a pretty strong letter. You are dead. Pastor Paul wore this medical robe the whole time as he talked to us about this part. He said wouldn't it be great if we had a spiritual fit bit that would rate us so we would

know how we're doing physically, spiritually, it would be so fascinating. In reality he said you stopped your spiritual exercise. You've become complacent. You are dead. Listen to what the words were in,

*Revelation 3:1*

*I know all the things that you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive--but you are dead.*

Inside you just dying there's nothing there. There's no life. So you've got the right pieces on the outside but what happened to you. Pastor Paul took us to John Chapter 15. Those who remain in me Jesus speaking here and I in them will produce much fruit for part for me you can do nothing to stay alive. You have to stay connected to the source and the source is Jesus himself. Are you staying connected when everybody else around you says, yeah they're alive but you know that inside you are just dieing.

Jesus through John reveals to this church you guys might look like you're doing well. You're dead if you're not engaging your faith. You're not doing what you are called to do. How is your spiritual vitality these days? Are you alive? Is it vibrant, is it bubbling inside? Is your heart pounding for Jesus and what he's doing in your life or would you have to put up and say you know what I'm almost flat-lining.

When we go to the fourth church it was Philadelphia. Strategically located city. You recall in these letters that the letter represented the concepts and the ideas around that city. Ideas and phrases that they would understand. So Philadelphia was this doorway or gateway city that was used to spread the Greek culture Hellenism around the surrounding areas. It is was vital city. So in the letter John uses the terminology they would understand, you are a doorway city. Do you realize that he told the church as much as they're trying to spread Hellenism around the space, you are a doorway to spread the message of Jesus.

Do you get that? Pastor Paul shared with us. There is a door of salvation it was right down here and he invited people if you've not accepted Jesus come on and walk through the doorway of salvation. I can tell you many people that day that Sunday for the

first time walked in the door salvation.

They said I believe this, I'm in. For those of us who are followers of Jesus there's also the doorway of opportunity. Opportunities for us to step in that God is calling us to do things for the sake of the kingdom. He's asking us and I believe many of you know that God's been tapping on the shoulder saying I have an opportunity for you. Will you step in? Are you alive for the sake of the kingdom will you step through that door? I know all the things you do he said in,

*Revelation 3 8*

*....and I've opened a door for you but no one can close.*

I've opened the door. You're in the Gateway City and you're strategically placed. You are the door to other people around you. Will you step through that door and spread the news of who Jesus Christ is? Is it alive enough in you that you actually want to even step through that door?

Then finally we have Laodicea. Lukewarm. Remember this context here that Laodicea didn't have any of their own water they had to bring the water in. There was a city nearby that had beautiful cold water that was so amazing. They had built these aqueducts to bring the water down to Laodicea but by the time it got there it was just lukewarm and putrid and wasn't that great. There is another city nearby that had these hot springs it was just such amazing water but not to Laodicea, it got lukewarm. There is nothing beautiful and they would understand that language right away. See at the source the water's amazing.

But by the time I gets to Laodicea it's horrible and useless. He looks at them and says you guys are just like that. You guys are so far from the source. You're missing the awesomeness of Jesus. You're become just self-sufficient and your lives are not beautiful as they once were. You're just lukewarm. Recall the three aspects of the city. One they had all this wealth in the letter Jesus looked at them he said, you think you are rich but you're actually poor. They had these textiles all this clothing and in the letter he said you think you are closed well you're actually naked. They had these hospitals that would cure eye diseases remember that part of the letter

and he said to them you guys think you can see but you're actually blind. You're missing it. You're lukewarm. You're not close to the source. He said, look I stand at the door and knock, if you hear my voice and open the door I will come in and we'll share a meal together as friends. There's so much more ahead for you says Jesus. There's so much more ahead for you. Do you want to still be lukewarm? Or do you want to go back to the source and be cold so you are a refreshment or to be in the hot springs where you can bring healing. You can actually be really relevant and make a difference. Those are the five letters we looked out of the seven. Feedback. Feedback to those churches but it's just as much feedback for us today as it was back then.

As I said in the front feedback requires response. Now as you look at these letters you can see them perhaps and kind of feel guilty or maybe you see them as a reprimand and say I'm feeling so bad. In reality these are from the heart of a pastor. These are from Jesus himself. He's not necessarily reprimanding as he is saying, come on, don't miss it. He wants to encourage them don't lose what you had.

You know in many ways we all come to these decision points in life don't we. In reality Jesus is always kind of prompting us to say come on. Here's your next step. I think in many ways these letters are simply those pieces. Come on guys. We're kind of cars out of alignment aren't we? We're always going off the track in one direction. Jesus in His beauty and his love keeps coming back to us and saying come on. I think these letters are simply that.

I was reflecting on my own faith journey this past week and I can point to all these pieces along the way where God in many ways was saying Matt are you in? Starts back when I was eight years old at a Christian camp and my counselor sat down with me and presented the beauty of Jesus to me and says Matt do you want to believe? In as much as an 8 year old can understand I said yes, I do, it actually this makes sense to me. I want to pray and receive Jesus. It was when I turned 14 and I was prompted to be baptized. I stepped forward into baptism and presented and shared my story with those in my church and was baptized as Christ calls us to. I said yes I'm going to do that. I feel the prompting of God

to do that.

Once again we're having a baptism service here on Easter weekend. If you have not been baptized. Simply put, I think that's God's letter to you this morning, why aren't you being baptized? What holds you back from being baptized? It's time.

I recall when I was in grade 11 when I was 17 years old and God was prompting me Matt, are you in or are you not. I was going into the lukewarm category of life and Jesus looked to me and said are you in or are you not? I remember for two months I just wrestled with it. Do I really want this Christian thing or don't I? Let me tell you if you're here and in grade 11 or 12, you are in such critical years. Once Grade 12 is done and you graduate and take off into wherever, if you have not landed things in grade eleven or twelve I'm not sure where you're going to head. Make a decision make a call.

I recall at that time God saying Matt if you do this you've got to get rid of all your friends. They weren't bad friends. But they also weren't friends that we're taking me somewhere, it was lukewarm. After two months of wrestling, I said OK God I'm in. I'm sitting in a math class actually when I decided this. I don't know why I was there but maybe the numbers just added up in my head. I kept going. When I hit university I needed someone to guide me in my faith. How is it going to develop good rhythms? I found someone to mentor me and guide my journey of faith and for three years he just helped me.

When Jan and I got married for the first six months we never went to a church. We just went for walks and we had to wrestle. OK. Is the local church important or not? Is it going to be part of our faith journey or not? God prompted us saying you guys got to be in. You need a community around you. Step in and do it. We stepped in and we've been heavily involved ever since even before I was a pastor. My transition from my banking career over a three year period to becoming a pastor God said Matt, I've got other people to be in the banking business, I need you here.

We have these prompts right. God speaks. He writes us letters he gives us feedback. Feedback requires a response. As I shared before every December I sit

down over Christmas and I reflect on my year. Lately I've just been using North Park's own personal reflection exercise and here's my notes I did this past December. In many ways this now becomes God's letter to me. As I pause and pray and think, God what do you have for me. What have I been missing where do you want me to go what are the prompts, what's my letter. I'll just share a few things that came my way this past December.

One was around my marriage I thought about three instances in the fall of last year where I was let me just say a less than stellar husband. There were these two or three day moments of just silence and bad engagement. I actually shared this with Jan just past week just to remind her that I was going say this. She goes I have no idea what you're talking about. I'm glad she didn't know but I knew in my own soul that I was not the husband I was being called to be.

I had to write that down and it was God's letter to me. Matt, are you going to be the husband you are called to be or not? Step it up. My emotional quotient in my marriage had declined too far last fall. How are you doing? A friend of mine and I get together every once in a while. He doesn't live in the city we come together. We're really good for each other. He can challenge me and encourage me. It was amazing but we got together here and there nothing really consistent. God impressed on me last December Matt you need to connect with him regularly as for all your own personal growth. You guys have to connect. I went and met with him in December and I told him this and he looked at me and said I've been thinking the exact same thing. So starting this year the first Monday of every month it's in our calendars we meet for five hours. We grab dinner. We talk. We pray because I needed it. I know I need it because if I don't have that voice it becomes this slide.

Finally in the area of generosity there's been a number of people in this church that have been such an influence on my life. What does it mean to be generous? This prompt me more ways in that area my own life too. So those have become a bit of the letter that God has been writing to me. My revelation letter.

As we've gone through this series what do you

believe God is prompting in your life? So on this piece of paper that you have there is a few things that you can be pondering and thinking about. First of all confession. I think in many ways it begins with confession doesn't it. Is there something you simply need to confess before God? Is there a relationship that you are messing up that you are not being all you are called to be? You simply have to confess it. This morning say God I haven't been what you've called me into. You have to confess your apathy. Do you have to confess cultural convergence? That the world around you is just so beautiful there's so many nice bouncy rubber balls that you can chase after. You are not sure. Do I even follow Christ anymore or do I just chase after the next thing that's posted on social media because it looks kind of neat?

But secondly is there a door God is calling you to walk through? Perhaps it's a door of salvation you've never made a commitment to follow Jesus and you need to come here this morning and plan to put a piece of paper down here and say God I'm in, I believe in you. Or is there a door of opportunity that God has been asking you to go through. My guess is you already know. He's been poking you for the last day week month maybe even years and you keep saying yeah yeah I'll start serving next year, I'll start giving next year, I'll start talking about my faith. Next year, it's always next year and God is saying the door is open now. Are you going to decide this morning that you are finally going to walk through that door of opportunity that God has been presenting to you for so long? Have you been avoiding it? How about spiritual rhythms? Is there a spiritual rhythm that you use to practice that was so amazing and you've gotten away from it because life just took over? Is there a rhythm that you know you've been telling yourself? I got to just start praying. I've got to just start reading the Bible. I've got to start journaling. I've got to practice solitude and I'm not sure which one it is but you will know, the spirit will speak to you. Have you gotten away from those rhythms?

You see when Jesus says to stop, to repent, and to redo. Those redos are often those spiritual disciplines that we need that will take us back to the first love we had at one time that we've gotten away from because life has just taken over. Life never takes over. You decide to let life take over. Is there

a light you are called to shine? These churches were represented by these seven lamp stands and they were called to be these lights in the middle of the cities. You see darkness can never overcome the light. The light can simply get dim and not be as effective. Has God been calling you to be a light to speak to a certain person that you just know you're called to be their light? Or is there a place in your neighborhood, your place at work, your school that God is saying are you going to start shining a little bit? Are you going to keep hiding? Or is there something else?

I'm going to ask the worship team to come forward at this time. We are going to have some soft music playing for a minute so you can put your thoughts down. What's God speaking to you? Right on the bottom of this piece of paper, tear it off and then I'm going to ask you. Please do not think of what your spouse is going to say. Don't think of what your friends are going to think of you. Put aside any fears you might have. This is between you and God. Here's what I do know. God is speaking that's assumed. God is speaking. He's here. The Spirit is moving. The Spirit is present. It's a matter of do you choose to respond, or do you choose to hide.

## **Points to Ponder**

### **A Message to the Church**

#### ***North Park***

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

- 1) Reflect on your faith journey. What are some of the points along the way where God has called you to go deeper? To change direction? To enter into an opportunity?
- 2) In looking back over the past five weeks of messages, what themes stand out to you?
- 3) How have these messages encouraged you in your journey of faith?
- 4) What do you believe God's letter to you would include?
- 5) What do you believe God would include in a letter to North Park?
- 6) What are some next steps in your journey of faith?