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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
May 25, 2014
5th Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 54:7-13 John 14:13-21
Hymns: 281; 779; 408; 409:1

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Revelation 3:14-21

14 “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: 15 “I know your works, that you
are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So
then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will
vomit you out of My mouth. 17 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— 18 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. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and
chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 20 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. 21 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.
22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the
churches.’””

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Risen Savior, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Wake up calls

I do believe that this is a concept that fits our times, one that we all appreciate. If you have spent many nights in a Motel you may have heard someone request a wake-up call at the front desk. Yes, there are alarm clocks, and I always set my cell phone to serve as an alarm to wake me up as well, but if there is an important meeting early into the morning or I need to get an early start I will request a wake-up call.

There are a lot of other “wake-up calls” that come in life. One may get a “wake-up call” from the doctor when we have an annual check-up. Or it may be even more upsetting when one gets a “wake-up call” from one’s own body sending one into a health crises. These “wake-up calls” tell us that the current situation has got to change. It has got to change positively and it has got to change dramatically, and it has got to change starting immediately. To a certain extent each of the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor where check-ups into the spiritual health of the different congregations, and each of them had their own areas of concern that needed attention from the pastor of that particular congregation. The pastor is addressed in each letter as the messenger or the angel of the congregation. However, none of the other letters had the degree of severity in the Lord’s tone as did the letter before us this morning. It is important that **we** take the warnings of this letter to heart. They were written for **our** learning, for our **edification**, that we might grow thereby. So may the Spirit bless our meditation on --

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THEME: The Letter to Laodicea: A “Wake-up Call” from the Lord.

As is seen in the other letters to the other churches, this letter also begins with the Lord addressing the angel or pastor of the church in Laodicea. For our purpose this morning, that is for the Spirit’s purpose among us this morning, **I** need to read this letter as it is addressed to the angel, or the pastor, of the church called St. Paul’s in Austin, Minnesota in the United States of America, in the year

of our Lord 2014. My point, or rather our Savior's point is that meditating upon this epistle is not an intellectual exercise in church history that we might be able to identify the problems that this other congregation that existed long ago in some distant land had, and how the Lord addressed those problems. It was recorded for our congregation, that we might see how the Lord regards the state of affairs in our congregation, and how He addresses our spiritual state as a congregation in this land called America. Indeed what is apparent is how much –

I. Jesus Disdains a Tepid Faith.

Revelation 3:14-16 ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

I think perhaps coffee drinkers understand this illustration pretty good. A good hot cup of coffee, nice and fresh brewed is good. Many Norwegians among us would say the hotter the better! Now summer is coming and we see commercials for ice coffee. It's not my personal favorite, but it is a pretty popular choice. It's considered pretty good. What you don't want when you order a cup of coffee in a restaurant is coffee that has been sitting on the coil for several hours and then allowed to cool down to something a little above room temperature. I have been served coffee like that more than once, and didn't find it acceptable. Think about it, you pay a good price for a cup of coffee these days, often over two bucks, you don't want stale acidy tepid coffee!

Now let's consider the Lord's expectations from us. He reminds us of who He is and how He has served us. The Lord is the great “Amen!” What He says is not only as good as done, IT IS DONE! He is the faithful and true witness. He speaks the truth all the time, and is always faithful in His promises toward us. He never deserts us, or forsakes us, leaving us on our own. He is the source of all creation. He is the Master of the universe, and still He takes note of each of us, and cares for us in all our ways. He has redeemed us with His own blood. How do we serve Him in return for all His gracious blessings? Is it nothing better than a tepid cup of stale

coffee? And we think we are doing wonders for the Lord? For us to evaluate this for ourselves and our personal service to the Lord we need to compare our service to the Lord with His service to us. We should not be comparing how well we do compared to other Christians that we may know who, in our opinion, aren't doing so well. We need to look at not only the quantity of our service to the Lord but the attitude that lies behind the service.

It is great to come to church, but are we here joyfully? I hope so, because this hour of worship should be one of the most joy-filled hours of our week. We should come before the Lord with gladness because He has made us, and He has preserved us, and He has redeemed us, granting us life and salvation. This is the gospel which we **celebrate** each and every week as we praise our Savior and our God! You see it is not enough to go through the motions, or to fulfill one's duty. No, it is the zeal, the love, the joy that fills the hearts that makes the fruits of faith real and wonderful to God in heaven.

What He saw in Laodicea were people, confessing Christians, going through the motions of being good Christians. What the Lord wants is our hearts. That he didn't see. It is easy to think of others as being "lukewarm Christians," but how often doesn't that describe us in our manner of life as well. If we can see this in others, what are we doing to encourage them in their faith, to help rekindle the fire in their faith? If not much, then maybe we are more tepid than we want to admit. If quite a lot, and we don't see much response, don't be discouraged, but also realize how difficult it is to rekindle a cooling faith.

We might be tempted to think "A cooling faith is still faith." Look at the words of the Lord. The Lord finds a tepid, lukewarm faith rather disgusting. He loves to see us hot. If not hot, then cold, those who never believed, for they may indeed rejoice to hear the gospel, but tepid? Tepid Christians yawn when they are absolved and snooze through the sacrament of the altar, and find that there are just so many other things to do and people to see that one might not find it convenient to be our Savior's guest at church where we are just going to hear the same stuff over and over again anyway. That is like the stalest of coffee, and why wouldn't the Lord spit it out, spit **us** out of His mouth?

Because the Lord is **gracious**. **Very** gracious indeed! Do we realize that --

II. Jesus Is the Only Source of the Spiritual Necessities of Life.

Laodicea was a wealthy trading center. They made a great deal of money in the sale of fine clothing, and they had a mint that produced the coin of the realm, and they also produced and sold to many nations healing salves and ointments. The people were secure materially. They had a good life. And that indeed can be trouble for the child of God. The Laodicean Christians were getting slack in things spiritual because they were so wrapped up in their pursuit and enjoyment of things temporal.

Revelation 3:17-18 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— 18 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.

When we feel secure in our temporal lives, well you know we relate so much so closely to our material temporal lives, we get comfortable when things are going along smoothly in life. We get so comfortable we don't give the spiritual as much thought as we should. And when we place too much significance in the material, even when we have more than the necessities of life we think we are doing poorly, and pursue the temporal and material more avidly, and have even less time for the things of God. The Laodiceans were caught up in the material. They thought that they had what they needed in the materials things of life. Life was good, and they were going to church on Sundays, so there you are – what more do you need?!

The Lord saw a need for that “wake-up call!” You don't know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked! The natural man is all these things. The old adam in us, in the Christian living in this temporal life, is all these things. If we let things spiritual slip, if we

let our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ **cool**, we are forgetting that we are spiritual wrecks without Him!

So many of the things that we think are so necessary for our lives to be good, well, they just aren't necessary. There is one thing needful, that is the Lord Himself and the gospel of His love and forgiveness that is found in Him and in Him alone. **In Him** we find the **gold** that we need for life, **the treasure of God's pardon and heavenly peace** purchased with the ransom price we could never find on earth. **In Him** we find the **white robes of Jesus' righteousness** that cover our spiritual nakedness, and make us acceptable in the sight of God. **Only the Lord Jesus can provide** us with **the salve** that opens our eyes to the spiritual wonders of God's truth, of His grace and power and glory.

This is what the Lord Jesus wants **for** you. This is what He wants you to treasure in your heart and to make the center of your lives. That is why He sent this "wake-up call" to us, that is why --

III. Jesus Is Knocking on Your Door.

Revelation 3:19-21 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 20 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. 21 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.

It is important for us to remember that this letter was written to the Church, to believers. If we don't remember that fact then we will fail to properly understand what this picture is conveying. Jesus has come to the home of **His child**, a child He knows and loves. Jesus is standing at your door, and He is knocking. More than that, He is calling **your** name. He is trying to get **your** attention. He wants to wake you up from your spiritual slumber. He will at times send chastening into our lives in the different problems and distresses that we face in this life. Remember He doesn't do this in anger, but rather in love. He wants to draw us closer to Him, to seek His face, to hear His voice.

The Lord is standing at your door this morning and He is knocking. Open the door. Invite Him in. We can't do this on our own. But there remains in our hearts that flame or even that spark of faith who remembers the sound of the voice of our Good Shepherd. This is the voice that calls to us, the voice of the One who love us and gave Himself for us, and desires our eternal salvation. **“What a Friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear.”** (TLH 457:1) And He is the Friend who cares enough to give us that wake-up call we need to keep us in true in faith unto our end.

Conclusion: Hear what the Lord has to say to you. Our text concludes:

Revelation 3:22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

You have an ear with which to hear. The Lord has given you the gift of **spiritual** hearing. Know that when the Lord speaks to His church on earth He is speaking to you, that you might be built up in faith and life. A “wake-up call” should not be thought of as being only for others, but for you and me too, and for me also as the messenger of the Lord to his church here at St. Paul's in Austin, Minnesota. If we take this personally for our congregation, then we may be blessed by it. So let us freshen up our faith, and make it hot once more. Let us buy the true treasures which the Lord Jesus has to offer, and let us hear Him knocking and calling at our door, that we might be hot for the Lord in ministry and in lives of service to Lord and our fellow man.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.