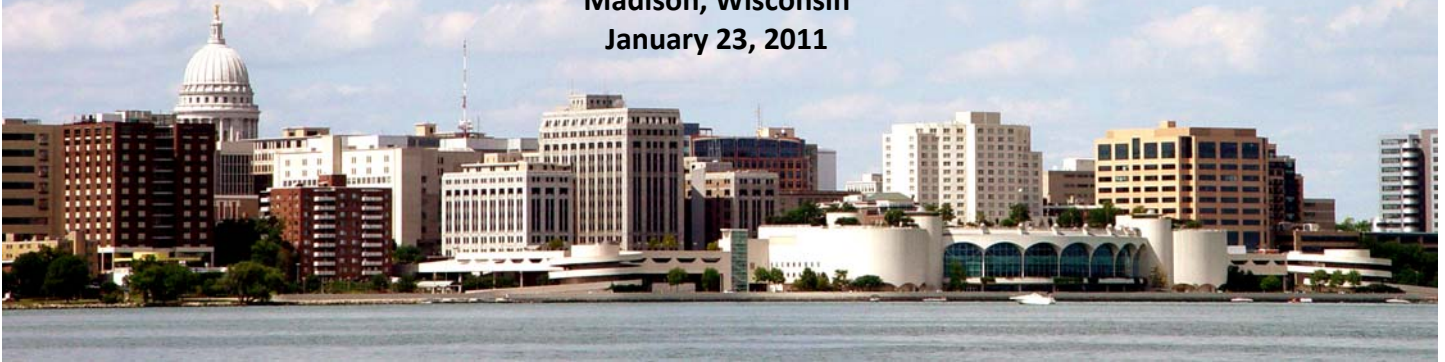


“Knock, Knock”

Revelation 3:14-22

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The British writer Charles Lamb once said that, “Not many sounds in life...exceed in interest a knock at the door.” It is interesting, in fact, that even with all of our technological advances over the past 200 years since he made that statement, a knock at the door (as primitive as it may be) is still able to get our attention even in a way that ranks right up there with a vibrating phone. When we hear a knock at the door, we normally drop what we are doing to go open it. Perhaps the knock is from a good friend who has stopped by to see how we are doing. Perhaps the knock is from someone from the post office trying to deliver a package. The knock could be from a girl scout in the neighborhood who is trying to sell us those amazing cookies. But whatever it is that brings people to our door, we know that a knock on that door has a way of getting our attention.

This morning I would invite you to think with me about a time in the Bible where Jesus is described as knocking on a door. The passage is found in Revelation 3. We know that the book of Revelation was addressed to seven congregations in Asia Minor, the Roman province that is now known as the nation of Turkey. In Revelation 2-3, the Lord sends a personal message to each of these seven churches and for the most part addresses both the strengths and the weaknesses of each congregation. Some were small but were strong in spirit. Some had a good reputation but were tolerating various false doctrines. Some were hanging in there but had members caught up in the sin of adultery. But when we get to the last congregation, when we get to the church in Laodicea, we find that the Lord’s report to this church was unique in that it is the only report among the seven in which the Lord points out absolutely nothing positive! It was all correction!

By way of historical background, I should point out that the city of Laodicea was strategically located at the intersection of three major highways, and as a result, it was highly commercial. The city was well known as a center for banking and commerce. The city was known for manufacturing black wool. It was known as the home of a medical school that had developed (and was producing) an ointment for the eyes. The city had used its wealth to build a huge stadium, several large public baths (or pools), a large theater, and several large shopping centers. I don’t know about you, but to me that is starting to sound just a little familiar—public pools, a medical college, a huge stadium, shopping centers, and a large theater! Then, of course, there was also a church in this city. It was most likely established by the apostle Paul. He wrote them a letter that we no longer have today. Paul referred to this letter in Colossians 4:16, where Paul told the church in Colossae to pass the book of Colossians on to the Laodiceans and then to read in Colossae the letter that he had sent to Laodicea. Today, therefore, we have only one of those two letters, the book of Colossians.

Nevertheless, Jesus is now reviewing the church in Laodicea, and it is not good. In fact, the general message from the Lord to the church in Laodicea is, "You make me sick!" If you will, then, please look with me at Revelation 3:14-22...

¹⁴ "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

¹⁵ 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, ¹⁸ I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; 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 will dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down 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.' "

As we look back over this message, I would like for us to take a few moments this morning to consider what the Lord's message has to say to those of us living here in Madison, Wisconsin, nearly 2,000 years later.

I. And one of the first things we need to notice is that Jesus was addressing A CHURCH THAT HAD PUT HIM ON THE OUTSIDE.

Another way of saying this is to say that the church in Laodicea was a church that was going through the motions, perhaps they were doing many things right, but in the middle of it they had completely forgotten about the Lord and had actually shut the Lord out of the congregation. Today we might refer to them as a "Church of Christ" without the Christ! Now, I know that when we hear about Jesus knocking on the door, we often think about it in terms of it being a personal thing, "Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart," and so on. And as I prepared this morning's lesson, I saw many articles and sermons that were based on verse 20 alone that were making that point. The authors were saying, "Based on this verse, Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart, and all you need to do is let Him in," and so on. In other words, this is a verse about becoming a Christian, "Jesus is knocking, and you need to open the door." And to be honest, that is the way I have always looked at this verse. However, as I got deeper into this passage, I suddenly realized: This message is not addressed to an individual; it is addressed to a congregation! It is addressed to those who were already Christians! And that's when it hit me: The church in Laodicea got so busy with their stuff that they perhaps inadvertently pushed the Lord out and left Him standing on the front porch of His own church, a church that He had purchased with His own blood. Up here on the wall we are looking at one of several famous paintings depicting this passage. Jesus is standing there knocking, and if you look carefully, there is no doorknob on the outside. In other words, He is not forcing His way in, but it is up to those on the inside to open the door on their own. We'll get back to this in a minute, but to reinforce what this passage is really about, I want to share my very weak attempt at Photoshop...



Not to be offensive or anything, but this is the danger that Jesus is addressing here. The church in Laodicea had shut the Lord out of His own church and had left Him standing on the front porch! The situation reminds me of what can happen between a husband and wife as one spouse gets distracted by work, or friends, or even children, and suddenly finds that the other spouse is on the outside...knocking for permission to come back into the marriage. And what shocks me in this passage is that the members of the church in Laodicea apparently have no idea what they have done! Here they are going along with business as usual—preaching, teaching, potluck dinners, bowling fellowships, whatever—and in the middle of

all of that activity they had no idea that they had slowly pushed the Lord outside His own church! In verse 17, ***“...you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.”*** I am reminded of the Emperor’s New Clothes. Everybody knew that the emperor was naked...except for the emperor!

The problem is stated so clearly right up at the beginning, in verse 15, where the Lord says, ***“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot.”*** In other words, unlike the other congregations, there was no blatant false doctrine being taught or tolerated, but neither were they really standing for anything good! They were neither hot nor cold. They were on neither extreme, but they were just there. They were just keeping house as a congregation. And when He sees this, the Lord gets sick. In verse 16, Jesus says, ***“I will spit you out of My mouth.”*** The word is the word for vomit. That’s pretty gross, isn’t it? When the Lord sees a congregation just kind of coasting along doing nothing, it makes Him want to vomit!

Today, we know how important it is to keep our food at the proper temperature. Several years ago, Keola had to get Serve Safe certified for her job with the school district, and as she was studying for the test, I happened to pick up the textbook for the class, and I guess now I pretty much regret it. I had no idea there were so many ways food can hurt you! But the basic message on keeping food safe is to keep the cold food cold and the hot food hot. And if you don’t it can make you sick, really sick. Eating food that has not been prepared, kept, and served at the right temperature can be life-threatening. That is what Jesus is saying here, since you are ***“...neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.”*** And again, this is the strongest and most severe of the messages to any of the seven churches. Not a single positive thing is said. Like a cup of coffee that has been sitting there for 20 or 30 minutes, it gets to the point where it is lukewarm, to the point where it is truly disgusting. While hot, it was great, but lukewarm, not so much! When it comes to coffee, I know some people who like it piping hot, I know some people who like it over ice, but I don’t know anyone who likes their coffee lukewarm. But that was the situation with the church in Laodicea: They were lukewarm. We find, then, that Jesus found Himself shut out of one of His own churches.

II. Secondly, though, in spite of what the church in Laodicea had done to the Lord by leaving Him on the outside, we find that THE LORD WAS STILL STANDING THERE AND THAT HE WAS PATIENTLY KNOCKING, VERY GENTLY ASKING FOR PERMISSION TO BE ALLOWED BACK IN.

And in the original language, the idea is that Jesus had been standing there for some time, He had not given up, but He was continually and very patiently knocking on the door. Not only that, but the word for ***“knock”*** is a word that refers to knocking with the knuckles as opposed to beating with the fist. There are two words

Jesus could have used here, and He used the word for “knocking.” The Lord, then, was not trying to beat down the door, but He was standing out there waiting for permission to be invited back inside.

Isn't that amazing? Here is the Creator of the Universe, and having been kicked out of His own church, he continues to stand there patiently knocking at the door. And what is amazing here is that Jesus takes the initiative. We do not need to beg Him to come back to us, but He is already standing there. Jesus is making the offer, and the offer is always there. No matter what we may do, even if we make the Lord sick, the Lord continues to knock. I don't know about you, but when I knock on someone's door and they do not answer, there is a point when I give up. There is a point where I just turn and walk away. If nobody answers after a few knocks, I figure they are either not home or they don't want to see me! But the Lord is always out there! And so the idea is that even if we somehow manage to shut the Lord out, He is always there offering to come back in. He does not force us to go outside groping around in the dark, but He is standing right there on the porch. Jesus knocks! What amazing love He has for us!

So, we have a church that has slowly moved the Lord out, we have the Lord standing out there on the front porch knocking, and all of this brings us to another basic idea this morning, and that is...

III. ...we have a reminder that IT IS OUR PRIVILEGE AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO LET THE LORD BACK IN. In other words, IT IS UP TO US TO OPEN THE DOOR.

And again, this is not so much a personal thing as it is a matter for the whole congregation. However, what is a congregation other than a group of individuals? And so if we have slowly bumped the Lord out of first place, if we have shuffled Him out the door because we are too busy with all kinds of other stuff, the Lord tells us in this passage that we are responsible for letting Him back in. Again, He will not force his way in, He will not be breaking down the door, but we must be the ones to open that door and invite Him back in.

There are many reasons, of course, for not letting the Lord back in. Perhaps we never hear the knocking. Maybe we are too busy doing other things—not necessarily bad things, but things that distract us from what is truly important. I am thinking of the time when Jesus was hanging out at the home of Mary and Martha. You might remember that Mary was sitting at the Lord's feet listening, but Martha was too distracted to pay attention because she was too busy preparing dinner. Preparing dinner is not bad, but the Lord had to remind Martha that Mary was doing what was truly important. And again, let's remember that this applies not only to us as individuals but also to all of us together as a congregation. Let us not get distracted to the point where we miss what is truly important.

And to avoid missing the point, please notice what the Lord actually says in verse 20. He makes the offer conditional as He says, “*...if anyone hears My voice and opens the door...*” The key to opening the door is to hear the Lord's voice. In other words, we must listen to the word of God. We are not talking about starting any new programs, we are not talking about making a few little tweaks to our worship to make it more appealing to the world, but we are talking here about listening to the word of God. Slow down, refocus, and listen—do not let this world keep us so busy and distracted that we do not have time to open the door.

IV. There is a final thought for us to consider here, and that is, THE LORD MAKES A PROMISE, THE PROMISE OF A DEEP AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP.

In verse 20, the promise (the offer) is that Jesus will come in and that all of us will dine together, that we will share a meal with the Lord. What an awesome invitation! What an awesome promise! To be able to sit down

and eat with God is such a great honor. These days, it seems that just sitting down at a table can be a great blessing. So many foods are now being specially designed to eat in the car. Soup is made in cans that fit in cup-holders that you can drink while driving. Gum now comes in cup-holder sized containers. You can buy cookies in cup-holder size little cans. I was eating at Taco Bell this last week and I had what they called a “Crunch-wrap Supreme.” It was good, and in the description, they gave all of the details, and then they said that it is “wrapped up and grilled for maximum portability.” Everything around us is made to be quick and easy. But the Lord’s promise is that He will **“come in”** to us and that He will dine with us. He is inviting us to sit down for a meal. Our society may be looking (spiritually speaking) for a quick snack, for something we can take on the road. The world around us is looking for efficiency and speed, but the Lord wants to come in and stay for a while.

And please remember, this promise (this thoughtful, generous offer) is being made to those who had shut the Lord out of their congregation. The offer is being made to those who apparently no longer had time for the Lord.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, we have a warning from the Lord Himself, a reminder that we are not to put Him out in the first place, a reminder that we are not to get distracted, a reminder that we are to keep the Lord in first place. Again, as Charles Lamb once said, there are “...not many sounds in life... [that] exceed in interest a knock at the door.” As we go back to work or school tomorrow, let us then try to remember what the Lord said here. Whenever we need to knock on a door, and whenever someone knocks on our door, let us be reminded to make sure that the Lord is the focus of this congregation. In other words, let us not even give the Lord a reason to knock, but let us make sure that He is always the guest of honor in the first place. As a congregation, let us not be a lukewarm church, let us not make the Lord sick, but let us keep ourselves focused on the Lord and His word in everything we do—in our Bible classes, in worship, in every sermon, in every fellowship activity, in our Vacation Bible School, in our clothing give-away—in everything!

In our own lives, keeping the Lord first means that we read the word of God and that we then do the best we can to live it. We obey the word of God by changing our lives so that what we are doing matches what He is telling us to do. We then allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. At that point, the Christian life begins, and we work together in God’s kingdom to teach the word of God to the rest of the world. As I see it, our goal in this life is to glorify God. If you have any questions, we hope you will pull us aside after the worship service this morning, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com