

August 14, 2022

Scripture: Revelation 3:14-22 The Message to Laodicea

Jesus Knocking at the Door: The Brokenness of the Church

Most of you are aware that I am currently offering a class that looks at various world religions, as taught by Rev. Adam Hamilton. And one of the reasons I chose to offer the class was because when you look at the population of the world, we must recognize how our neighbors do not necessarily believe what we believe.

### Demographics from Pew Research Center 2020

**Christianity 32% (2.3b) Islam 24% (1.9b) Unaffiliated 16% (1.2b) Hinduism 15.1% (1.1b)  
Buddhism 6.9% (500m) Ethnic religions 10% (800m) Judaism .2% (14m)**

And so, the hope is for recognition of tolerance and acceptance. The other hope is the fact that maybe in this study, we all grow a little bit deeper in our faith. And be better prepared to respond to the question **“What do you believe?”**. Especially if we have the opportunity to witness to those 1.2 billion unaffiliated people, which is the number of those who choose not to have faith in a religion.



In our lesson today, from this window, we hear Jesus knocking on the door of the church of Laodicea, and he challenges us to answer with our beliefs.

Here's the background. The book of Revelation was written is a book written in certain form of literature, that form is Apocalyptic- *apo* is the Greek word meaning from and *kalypsis* means covering. Apocalyptic is an uncovering, a revealing of something otherwise unknown. And this type of literature has certain features: There is a division of history into old and new ages. A conflict between good and evil. It also includes code words, numerology, and cryptic symbols. And there is always a revelation which communicates a hidden knowledge by variety of means like visions and dreams that transport the viewer to another realm.

For the book of Revelation, the visions and dreams occur to a Christian follower named John who wrote Revelation while a political prisoner of the Roman emperor, on the island of Patmos around 92-96 Common Era. And while he is there, he has these visions and dreams and what they come down to is Jesus challenging the Church to be strong against the Roman culture, be strong in believing God's victory over evil and death.

At this point in the writing, Jesus is speaking to four churches of the Roman province (modern day Turkey) sharing what is good and what is not so good. Each of Jesus' letters to the churches begin with a description of His character. It highlights His authority and divinity reminding the listener who is speaking and that is paramount to listen. The way He describes Himself to each church is different. He emphasizes certain aspects of His character which are especially important for that specific church to pay attention to.

In this particular section, Jesus speaks to the church of Laodicea. This was a town located on the crossroads of two major trade routes as it was built on the river Lycus. The city was prosperous, and the people loved their leisure and games. Many theaters, stadiums, baths, and amphitheaters have been found by archeologists. It was in this atmosphere that the church of Laodicea existed. Unfortunately, according to this writing, this church was a bit egocentric, living for themselves, not for God, nor others.

So, Jesus begins, **Revelation 3:14 – “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.** Notice, Jesus describes Himself as ‘the Amen’. We use this word at the end of our prayers to mean “let it be so”, but when Jesus uses the word, he speaks of himself as ‘truth’. Jesus often used this word at the beginning of sentences rather than the end.

Wherever in Scripture, you see Him saying, “truly, truly, I say to you” the word in Hebrew he is using is “Amen, Amen, I say to you.” The word indicates a truthful pronouncement. When God/Jesus says, “Amen” it means “this is true.” When we say “amen,” we mean “let it be so.”

His description as the “Amen” is important. It means that He is about to tell them the truth they need to hear. So, the pronouncement Jesus give this church, is he tells them they are “lukewarm”, and goes on to describe them like this in verse 17, **17 For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.** While the church is made up of a community of people who do need any material items, they do not see how much they are lacking in their spiritual growth and development. So, he advises them to **buy gold refined by fire and white robes.** The symbolism is **repentance and new beginning.** Just as a fire burn away any impurities in gold, and white symbolizes purity, Jesus says **19 I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent.** The truth the Amen speaks is telling them to turn to God, because God loves them and wants more for them. More than they even understand. God has a purpose for them.

Jesus goes on to say, verse 20 **Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking** *Jesus* wants to transform them, and bless them, if they will open the door.

Recently I read a book recommended by our Youth director called *Faith for Exiles*, and it speaks of the 1.2 billion unaffiliated people outside the door of the church. The research they conducted to see what has kept such people away from the church, or sometimes, driven them away from church. But it also offers some advice on how to reach them and keep the current young people in our churches. One of the suggestions is to foster intergenerational relationships within the church. It’s about sharing and connecting to encourage spiritual development. And another suggestion is to work on helping people develop an understanding of their calling. What is God’s purpose in their lives. What is it God wills for each person, and how to discern that.

This past week, our church experienced the blessing of both. The call went out to the youth of the church to visit some of our elderly members, the youngest being 82, the oldest 95, the youth went, along with some of the leaders of the church, divided into three groups. And while I give credit to the leaders for preparing the kids to be encouraging and kind, mostly what I witnessed was the older generation connecting with these youth that was simply inspiring. One member was able to inform the children how our church came to be, with the help of Mr. Hershey. Another told a youth how they were the first to bring in the pole vault to Hershey schools. And others shared the changes of the school system through PA, going from local one room schools to schools defined by townships. However, it wasn’t just about them, those members took great interest in the youth, asking them about their schooling, their interests, and their hopes of what to do after schooling. In the end, the kids loved it as much as those they visited. It was a day affirming the beliefs Jesus has for the Church, to be a body that connects, inspires, and encourages one another, by visiting and praying together.

Going back to the church of Laodicea, if you turn to Paul’s letter to the church of Colossae, we read, **16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.** And there is a part in that letter that I want to share that sums up what Jesus was saying to the church, and what we in turn need to remember when we talk about our beliefs in the church. Paul writes in chapter 3: **12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.**

Friends, to look at that window and know the text from Revelation and Colossians is to know there is brokenness in the Church, there is brokenness when we lose touch with centering ourselves with God and each other. But the offering Jesus gives by knocking at the door is to remind us of all that God gives us in this beautiful, diverse, body of faith loved by Christ, refined to love each other. So maybe the next time you have an opportunity to share your beliefs with someone who is not of this faith, you could say that about your church. We are a broken body, bound by the beautiful love of Christ.