

## **Sermon Reading: Revelation 3:14-22**

*“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:*

*These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. <sup>15</sup> I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.*

*<sup>19</sup> Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. <sup>20</sup> Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*

*<sup>21</sup> To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

### **Sermon Theme: Hot or Cold: Which One Will You Be?**

You walk out, pick up the mail for the day, and while you check through what you received, you find a from someone you hadn’t heard from in some time. You get excited as you open up the letter thinking about what they might have to say. Then you start reading:

“You are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. You think that you are fine. But I know better. You make me sick. I’m so disgusted with you and how you are living that it’s like I want to vomit you out of my mouth. I’m almost to the point that I don’t want anything to do with you. You sicken me.”

You probably would be pretty upset. Upset that they would say such horrible things: “How dare they say that about you! They have no right...” Or upset because obviously you did something wrong.

I wonder how the people in that church of Laodicea responded when they heard this letter in Revelation 3. There’s not a single word of commendation or praise about them. No, these Christians disgust Jesus. Jesus is the Amen, the ultimate affirmation that what he says is most certainly true. He is the faithful and genuine witness; what he says isn’t biased or dependent on how someone is going to receive it. He is the ruler of all creation so what he says goes and needs to be taken seriously. And Jesus has this message for the angel of the church—the pastor of Laodicea. And the pastor had the responsibility to share this message with his

congregation. **“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”**

Laodicea was a wealthy city in what is modern-day Turkey near the Mediterranean Sea. The city was renowned for its rich manufacturing and as a commercial city. But the group of Christians there had some serious problems. On the outside it probably didn't look like that. No, they said: **“I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.”** They had work to do and they were good at it. There wasn't enough time to do other things; in fact, they didn't feel like they needed to. Life was good. They had God's Word. They were Christians. They had their church, they probably gathered for worship, there wasn't anything horribly wrong; at least that's how they felt. But living as God's people, their relationship with God wasn't all that important to them. But they couldn't be more wrong. Jesus is about to throw them up, vomit them out his mouth. Think of how when you've eaten or drank something that you don't like and you almost gagged on it. That is how these people are to Jesus. They disgust him. I'm about to throw you up, ridding myself of you, Jesus says. But not yet...

These words were recorded, preserved through the centuries, and passed down to us today. Now, from Jesus, your pastor has this message for you Zion Lutheran Church in Valentine, NE: Jesus says, “I know your deeds, you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other.” We can show this by the way we do the ministry of the church and give the impression that a relationship with God is not that important. We all know someone who hasn't been in church for quite some time. By not individually reaching out to them and inviting them we give the impression that we don't care, regular attendance for worship isn't that important, and we aren't really concerned about their relationship with God. We give that impression when there is work to be done in the church and we fail to take the initiative and expect other people to do it. We give that impression when the work of the school is expected to be done by the school parents, school teachers, and school people. We give that impression when we allow worship and even the upkeep of our church and school is left to whatever is “good enough” and not what is excellent. Instead of being mission minded and focused, we become budget focused—tied down with the numbers. It can seem like we hide behind those words “good steward” and “faithful managers of money” when at the heart it looks more like we are uncomfortable or unwilling to change or worse a lack of trust in God's promises.

But Jesus isn't just speaking to the as a Church as a whole. He speaks to you and me the individual. “I know your deeds (insert your name),” Jesus says, “and you are neither hot nor cold.” Were you excited to come to church today, or was it because you didn't have other

plans so you decided you could fit it in? While here in worship, do you just mumble along with the words and are physically present while your mind is off on what's for lunch, your plans this afternoon, the work later this week? You can say all the words you want, but the impression that is being left for your neighbor, your children, your grandchildren, is that God's Will, being in God's house, your relationship with God is not as important as your own personal comfort level, your own personal plans. And even if no one else notices, Jesus does.

How evident is it to other people that you are a Christian? I'm not saying you have to be parading around town with a t-shirt that says it, the only things you post online are Christian, and that's the only type of music or movies you listen to or watch. But when a random stranger sees you—how you live, act, and treat other people—would they be surprised you say you are Christian? When your children watch you at home, do they see a parent who is a model of their heavenly Father's love for them? When your spouse looks to you, are you showing Jesus' selfless sacrificial love, putting them first? Or do they see someone who is just going through the motions. Again, Jesus knows.

And Jesus wants you to know that lukewarm Christianity disgusts him. It's even worse than complete denial of the faith because those who oppose the gospel still show some interest in spiritual things. Spiritual indifference is so dangerous because it gives you the idea that you are fine—as long as you can claim you are a Christian, a Lutheran, know the right words to say, your actions and life don't have to match up with it. It allows someone to remain in their sin and ignore the seriousness of their situation. It's an easy trap to fall into because as Jesus first told the Laodiceans, **"You do not realize."** We don't always realize that it is happening. Sometimes it seems there's this idea that someone who is stuck in sin—especially this indifference to God's Word and indifferent with their relationship with God—that their life must be miserable. But more often than not that's simply not true. Like those Laodiceans, we convince ourselves that everything is just fine. In fact, it's even better because we dull our consciences and stop listening to God's warnings in his Word. It's easy to say, "I know I should or need to do something" but continue to be indifferent, lukewarm Christians ignoring the seriousness of our continued sin unless someone tells us!

And so Jesus calls it how it is. He wants to make you uncomfortable. He wants to wake up a response. Either be hot or cold. Stop believing the lies you tell yourself and see that the problem starts with you.

And see the solution is Jesus. He hasn't spat you out. He doesn't give up on you. He's still speaking through his Word and his messenger, me your pastor. He says, **"Buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and slave to put on your eyes, so you can see."** Stop looking to

yourself; instead look to the one who saves. Jesus isn't saying you have to do something for these things. These are gifts he gives. Jesus is saying, "I know how you don't want to hear what you are. I know how this makes you uncomfortable; I know it might make you upset. But because I love you, I'm speaking to you the truth. No amount of gold, silver, personal accomplishments, best intentions, and promises could help you. Stop trying to be a better person, better Christian and look to me. I give you the true riches of forgiveness of sins refined and made perfect in the fire of my suffering and death on the cross. You didn't realize it but I knew that you were stained to the core with sin and shame. And now I am giving you pure white clothes that have been washed in my blood. It's my own cloak of goodness and perfection that I wrapped you with in your baptism so that your shameful sin is completely covered. I knew how you were blinded by sin and could not see. I give you my healing Word so that you see the truth."

Jesus stands at the door of your heart and he knocks calling out to you with the powerful words of the Gospel. It's with that good news that changes hearts from cold sin and spiritual indifference and opens the door to Jesus' invitation. Through the Word Jesus sends the Holy Spirit who teaches you and reminds you of what Jesus says to work faith in your heart; faith that is on fire for the Lord. Faith isn't just a thing that's there; it's alive and active. It's going to produce good works. It spontaneously flows through you as a child of God. As an apple tree will produce apples when it is healthy, so faith will produce good works when it is healthy and connected to Jesus. If you love Jesus, you will obey his commands. Faith isn't indifferent; it will be evident in your life.

And when it isn't, when it seems like God's Word and your relationship with God isn't all that important, when you struggle and fall into sin, Jesus calls out to you again. He knocks on the door and keeps on knocking because he wants you to turn from indifference to being excited for his love. He keeps knocking because the victory that he won on the cross he didn't need it for himself. He crushed the devil's head and paid for sin, for you. Jesus keeps knocking and calling out to you because he forgives your sin, he loves you and wants you to be with him. The more we grow in Jesus' love, the more we want to show that love. He calls out and invites you to that special meal of the Lord's Supper where you receive his body and blood to assure you he forgives you and to reinvigorate your faith. He doesn't spit you out because he has something waiting for you: it's wealth and riches that will never fade or be taken from you. The victory Jesus won over sin, death, and the devil, is yours. You have a place reserved on his throne in heaven. **"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches"** (v.22). Amen.