

“Who’s Knocking at Your Door?”
Colossians 4:2-6; Matthew 16:13-20;
Revelation 3:14-22

Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow
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As we start this morning, I feel I should say something more about Revelation because there’s a larger context out of which we are taking this particular passage and it feels that just jumping into the middle does it a little disservice. In the overall picture, it’s a vision of John as he is on an island, experiencing an encounter with the divine and seeing much more than what we are reading here. In this particular section he is talking to the churches that have been created.

When I say the word “churches” there’s a little bit of a problem because he probably wasn’t talking to Presbyterians in Laodicea, for example. Much of what we think of as “church” today hadn’t yet formed. The word itself has been translated as “church” but it really means “a gathering of people,” gathering around at an important time. So it was a gathering of the followers of Christ, and their worship and their life together being a community of faith. So that’s who he is talking to. Each one of the seven different churches gets a slightly different challenge from Revelation on what they might think about and who they are and what kinds of things they might do.

It sounds like the church in Laodicea did the initial asking, searching, and knocking and they encountered Christ. They recognized his voice and entered into the fold. In the process it had changed their lives. I would guess that part of that change was that they began to focus on their lives in a way that helped them become rich, to prosper, so that they felt like they didn’t need anything anymore. It feels like they were saying they didn’t even need the one they first encountered that got them on the path going in the right direction. At least, they are holding Jesus and their faith a little bit more at arm’s length. I’m not sure how committed they are. We have that description of them being neither hot nor cold, but just lukewarm.

To help me think about that, the image in this particular passage is about a door. What it feels like to me is that Christ is saying when the people begin to feel rich and prosperous and feel like they don’t need anything else, it’s a description for me of a common experience. Once we get things set in our lives and we have a particular way of doing things, we don’t like to change too much. We like to hold on to that way of doing things. We particularly do that if we think we have gotten to a good place—we feel rich, prosperous, successful. Our resources and abilities and success are now our focus.

But I would suggest that even if our lives don't appear to be in a good place, we have a sense of our own riches. We make something of our lives that we claim as our own richness and our own prospering. It's our way of creating our world, holding on. In doing that, we become comfortable with our way of doing things, our abilities, our successes, and our strategies for living life.

Then we realize that sometimes there are things that want to interfere with that. It could be people in our lives. It could be activities of a community. It could be new things coming that we don't want to have to deal with, such as technology. Oftentimes what we'll do is begin to build walls around ourselves to hold the world at bay. Usually we do recognize that we have to put a door in there because every now and then we have to go out and deal with the world. But we want to pull it shut quickly behind us whenever we can.

When I was first preaching, I was not very comfortable and sometimes I wished I had a door that I could hide behind. But it's that way in the rest of life as well. There are times when we just want a door we can hide behind, a way to hold the rest of it out. What the rest of it is, we don't always know.

There's a story that illustrates what I'm talking about, and you may recognize it. It's a story about these two young children, Sally and me, which is the way it's written, who are shoveling snow. Their life is not that different from mine. I have those moments in my life where it feels like what I'm doing is shoveling snow, just working my way along, doing the right thing. Everything seems pretty normal and then something comes along that wants to mess it up. I can't get to the door and shut it quickly enough. This story is *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*, by Dr. Seuss. Perhaps for a church like Laodicea, that's appropriate. It's a coming back that I'm interested in. The Cat makes a mess, and then what do you do when you've got a mess? The Cat finds all these ways to try to clean it up, but then they end up with a total mess. Then, because it's a children's book and we can introduce anything we want, there's this "VOOM!" and everything is perfect again.

This feels to me like a lot of the tensions in our lives. Oftentimes life is work, but it's stable work, it's reasonable. We have to shovel the path and we are really afraid of somebody like the Cat in the Hat coming along and messing things up. We see things out there that we think might do that, so we have our doors. Now the interesting thing about this is that in some ways, our society suggests that's exactly what you want to have happen. You want to have something come along and mess up your life. It's the same thing I talked about last week—bad is good. It's the bad things that are really the fun things. There's that tension here between wanting to have the grind, but also wanting to have the mess. It feels to me that what happens is that sometimes I get caught in that tension. I partly

want the mess and I partly want the stability, and living in the middle is neither hot nor cold. It's kind of lukewarm. I don't always think of tension as lukewarm. It is that tension I think this passage is inviting us to look at.

When we create the door, we begin to hold things out and we recognize that if we shut out the world we shut out a lot of life. When we shut ourselves down we shut out life as well. So the question is, what are we going to open the door to? What kind of life are we going to let in? Are we afraid that The Cat in the Hat is going to come into our lives and mess it up? Another way of saying that is what voices do we listen to, and do we think of the voice of Jesus and Jesus' presence in our lives like the cat? Is he going to come and mess things up for us and do we trust that things will be put back together at the end?

Most of my experiences are that when I do something that really messes things up, there's not a simple way of going "VOOM!" and everything is right again. So it matters what I let in, what I embrace. Jesus comes and says, "You're in that tension. You are lukewarm." The interesting thing about this is that he says, "I'm about to spit you out of my mouth." I've often heard it as "I *will* spit you out of my mouth." But the text there really has that sense of "about to." I think that's interesting because he says he's "about to spit you out of my mouth," but what is he doing? He's knocking at the door. He's saying, "You are in that tension. You are in that place where it's not good to be. It doesn't taste good. I'm knocking. Will you hear?"

Look at what's going on in your own lives. What are your riches? How do you think you're prospering? How do you get to the point of saying you don't need anything or anyone else? What happens when we begin to think that our own resources, our own abilities, our own successes have taken us to a place where we don't need anything else or anybody else? It feels to me like a place of loneliness, a place of alienation, a place of sadness because it pushes away. Indeed, I think that's what Jesus means when he describes the Laodiceans as being naked and blind and poor. Instead, he offers to come in and sit with them. He offers them real riches. He offers to enrich their lives. He offers to wrap their vulnerability in his grace. He offers to take the cataracts off their souls so they can see.

I had an experience yesterday in which I kind of felt a little that way. I was driving back from Seattle after taking my son some things he needed for college, and I was listening to the *Brothers Karamazov*. I was at a point where Ivan was talking with Alexia. He was trying to convince him that his faith wasn't valuable. How he was trying to do it was by describing how terrible human beings could be to their own children. It was a terrible passage in the book. Excruciating to listen to, but it did begin to paint this whole picture of vileness and evil. I found myself, as I

was driving, needing to take a look outside, to look beyond that vision that he was spewing into my ears. I realized that as I looked beyond what he was saying, that it wasn't a full description of the world. It was really a very small description of the world. I could see the wonder of the hills that I was passing and the nature around me, and realized that creation really is good. There is much that is good and great and wonderful. Not that there isn't evil. He made that plentifully clear in that picture he was painting for me. But what I realized is that when we see with the eyes God gives, we see beyond that evil. We see more than evil. We see more that can be and is and will be. We see the grace of God.

That's what Jesus is saying here as he knocks. Jesus knocks gently on our door. It depends on how ready we are; how ready our doors are. How ready is the door of our heart? How ready are we to let him in to sit and eat with us? Isn't that a wonderful description of what it means to be in relationship with someone you really care about? It's a description of the love of God entering into our lives, the grace of God being with us, one that sits and eats with us. And the thing to realize about this is that it is being written to a church, to a group of people. So really what he's saying is let him in to the group, to us. As he sits and eats among us, the very grace and love of God is alive with us so that we might know it's sustenance, we might know the wonder of sharing that love.

I don't know about The Cat in the Hat, or doors, but I do believe in the love and grace of Jesus Christ. And he enters our lives and brings that love and grace to us and invites us to share it as we live together. Amen.

Gracious God, you are with us even in the midst of the grind of daily life, in the midst of trying to shut the door on the mess that life brings in, and even there when we shut the door on you. You knock and you offer to come in and to be with us and among us, to eat with us, to let us know the wonder of your grace and your love. Lord, help us look beyond the mess, the changes, the transformations, and our own fear. Let us allow you in. Help us hear your voice and open the door to our hearts. Enrich our lives. Clothe our naked souls. Remove the cataracts that blind our souls and help us see with new eyes, your eyes, the wonder of your grace and the goodness to which you call us. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.