

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

‘And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation:

‘I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 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. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.’

### **“I Stand Neither For nor Against Apathy” Rev. Charles Schuster April 6, 2008**

You could make the point that Jesus was primarily interested in justice and spent his life looking for people who were treated poorly, that they might, in their lifetime, find justice. You could make the point. You could also see Jesus as a person who was put here on this earth to show us that God is like a loving parent, and that worship was made for us, as God’s gift to us, and that those who worship God are to worship God in spirit and in truth. You could maybe see Jesus as his primary concern was our salvation, and he was here on this earth to save us from ourselves, and you could make the case that he died for our sins. As I’ve been thinking about this subject, trying to determine Jesus’ primary mission, it has seemed to me that a great deal of what he said and did confronted a basic human problem, maybe even more basic than any of those I mentioned. Because I think his mission on earth, at least one of the primary ones, was around helping us learn to live fully, to deal with our apathy. I think that’s what abundant life is. I think it was in the statements he made and the questions he asked. Apathy, that says “I don’t know, and I don’t care.” There is no apathy in life when Jesus was around.

There’s no apathy in our neighborhood, in our part of town, I can tell you that. A month ago, the doorbell quit, and you had to stand at the door and knock and wait for the dog to bark. I tried to fix it. Three trips to Home Depot, a call into something called Mr. Electric, and now the doorbell works. But somewhere, up in the interstices of our house, some wires got crossed, and now we can’t turn off a spotlight. We have a spotlight that goes into the back yard, it’s one of those big lights that you see out at Hughes Stadium. You could do surgery under this light, and there is no apathy in our neighborhood because our doorbell works and our neighbors south and west of us cannot sleep. And many of them are Methodists, so if you see anyone asleep today, don’t bother them, because they’re already annoyed.

I think his concern was apathy, apathy that says, "I'm so afraid of life I will not live it." Apathy that says, "I'm so afraid of the future that I do not trust it." Apathy that says, "I'm so fearful of danger that I will not risk." And God said, "I know your works, you are neither hot nor cold, you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, and I'm about to spit you of my mouth. I stand at the door and knock." Strong words for a big problem. Paralysis, apathy, fear, indifference. Jesus' mission on earth, he stands at the door and knocks.

When Jesus walked this earth, he was strong in his words. And he said it often, and said it clearly, and said it to anyone who would listen, and he says it to us. What he says is, in one way or another, conversion. Conversion confronts apathy. Repeatedly he said it. The way he said it, "Get out of the boat," that's what he said. When he saw people down in the dumps, "Get out of the boat." When he saw people drifting through life – it's like Annie Dillard said, "We spent half our waking lives and all our sleeping lives like dolphins. We plunge and we surface. We lapse, and we emerge." And Jesus said it, he said "Get out of the boat." James and John, you sons of Zebedee, get out of the boat. If you think we're all in the same boat, then get out of the boat. You're not predestined to be what you've been. You are not predetermined to walk through your days like a puppet with a string. Get out of the boat. Walk on the water. Look at the lilies of the field. Do you hear the birds of the air? Get out of the boat, if the boat you're in's going nowhere you want to be. Because if you stay in the boat, you'll be like burying your talent in the ground. And if you do that, you may not find it to use it when you need it. Get out of the boat if you're going the wrong way. If your horse dies, dismount. If you're lost, there's Mapquest. You don't have to be lost. No exodus ever lasted a lifetime. Head for the promised land. No diagnosis is a death sentence. Get another opinion. If you don't like the result, stop doing what you're doing. He said that to Nicodemus one night, he told him that his wealth owned him, to sell what he had. Get out of the boat, Nicodemus.

We have a statue at the church now. I don't think many of you have seen it, because we haven't said much about it, but we've got a statue here. It's in the courtyard, behind the parlor. It's kind of hidden. It's subtle. It's been there about two weeks. It's Francis of Assisi, rich son of a rich family. He felt that life was wrong, sold what he had, gave to the poor, loved animals. You go and look at that, just down the east hallway, look through the window of the parlor. Go out there and see it. He's sitting on a bench, and there's just enough room on that bench for a child. Adults won't fit. There's a little lamb there, and some birds on his shoulder. Blessing of the animals. He got out of the boat. It's set in stone. There's a statue at our church now that wasn't there. We didn't tell you, but now you know.

But you don't have to look at a statue. We've got a family in the church who got out of the boat. It's a complicated story. I'll tell you a simple version of it. Once upon a time they were fixed in their jobs, fixed in their lives, lots of money, lots of power, they made it big. They weren't unhappy, but they were growing into a routine life that seemed to be motion without direction, a circle going nowhere. You wake up, you go to work, you get paid, you eat dinner, you go to sleep, you wake up. A kind of sameness to it, a sort of roundness without wholeness. She was a buyer for a string of airports. She was a boss. He was a manager for a string of restaurants. They called him "sir." They called her

“boss.” And they heard a voice that said conversion, that said in the way they heard it, “Get out of the boat.” A child was born to them, they got out of the boat. They walked away from money, from security, from power. They walked away, they found priority and value and service and joy. He cleans carpets now. She’s his boss, tells him where to go. They have a son. When he’s out on vacation from school, they get to be with him. The future for them, they’re not sure, but they’re not apathetic, and when they look into the mirror they see something now they wouldn’t have seen before. They see a smile on their faces. Like the statue in the courtyard. You look at Francis. He’s smiling. Apathy? Conversion will cure it, but we’ve got to get out of the boat.

The other thing that will conquer apathy is communion, but you’ve got to know what you can bring to the table. If you know what you can bring to the table, you can confront apathy. Looking back at the life and teaching of Jesus, there was a question that he asked frequently. He asked it often, he asked it clearly, and he asked it to anyone who would listen, and he asks it to us. He says, “What do you bring to the table?” Communion we have made into a sacrament, and it’s an important time in the life of our church, even more important in the spiritual lives of each of us as we gather at the table. Jesus was often inviting people to their house for dinner. When Zacchaeus was up a tree, trying to listen to Jesus when he spoke, trying to see where he went, when Zacchaeus felt so small, a tax collector without a conscience, a little man without a view, Jesus called him out of the tree and said, “Let’s go have lunch at your house. What do you bring to the table?” Before Jesus’ death, there was a woman with costly oil, and she was putting it on his feet, and the disciples told her to save it up and give it to the poor, and Jesus said to his friends, “Don’t be critical of this gift and what she has given. Don’t be hostile to the giver and the gift. What do you bring to the table?” A large crowd heard him speak. He spoke Beatitudes, “Blessed are the meek, and those who mourn, and those who are pure in heart.” A little boy brought a bag of fish and chips and the disciples said, “That will never do, five fish and two breadsticks, it’s an Easter crowd, what are we going to do?” Jesus said, “We can make it work,” and he did. Everybody ate, and Jesus asked, “What do you bring to the table?” It was a woman at the well who asked Jesus for some water, and before it was over he offered her living water, and raised questions about the way she was living her life. What do you bring to the table? When Jesus appeared on the beach with his disciples and they didn’t recognize him, they had run from the cross, but they recognized him in the breaking of the bread and they heard him ask, “Do you love me? Then you’d better feed my sheep.” What do you bring to the table?

The upper room was a rented facility, and the last supper was a common meal, and Jesus didn’t provide the bread, as far as we know. He didn’t debate the method of the serving of it. Others brought it to the table, it was Eucharist, and he gave them a mandate. He said, “Remember me, serve others, take the bread and the cup. What do you bring to the table?” I’ve long been a fan of the Smothers Brothers, and I know that dates me, but that’s okay, I like them. Some of you, too. Dick said to his brother one day, “What’s the matter with you, Tom? You seem despondent. What’s the problem?” Tommy said, “I am despondent. I’m worried about America.” “Well, what bothers you? Are you worried about poverty in the country?” “No, that doesn’t concern me.” “Are you concerned about the war in Iraq, or terrorism?” “No, that’s not a problem to me. It’s far off.” “Are you

upset about drugs and the youth of our nation?" "No, that's not it." "Well Tommy, what is it? You're worried about poverty and war and drugs, what are you worried about?" Tommy answered him, "I'm worried about apathy."

You and I will not be apathetic if we have to think about what we bring to the table. Leonard Sweet repeats a prayer that every one of us could, every morning as we wake up. "So far, of God, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped or lost my temper or been greedy or grumpy or nasty or selfish. So far I haven't done anything wrong at all, and I'm really pleased with that. But God, in a few minutes I'll be getting out of bed, and then I'm going to need some help." What do we bring to the table? What do we offer for the common good? Always, there's a way. Always, there's something we can bring. There's a story I heard this past week. A woman who's well known in her community for the garden that she made, brought flowers to friends and vegetables, won awards at the state fair. One year she wrote a letter to her son, a sad letter. "Dear son, I regret to tell you I'm too old to plant my garden, I think, this year. I may have to pay somebody to do it, or just give it up." Her son received her letter and he was very sad for two reasons. First of all, he knew how important that was to her. Secondly, he was in prison, and there wasn't much he could do about it. But he wrote her a letter. He said, "Ma, I wish I could help you, as I'm sitting here in my prison cell. But Ma, whatever you do, don't dig up the garden. That's where I buried the bodies." The prison warden monitored all the incoming and outgoing inmate mail, and within an hour of reading the letter, there were backhoes and guards with shovels in the back yard digging up the garden. (Laughter) I guess sometimes you don't have to get to the end of the story, do you. They found no bodies buried and they left disappointed, and the mother soon received a letter from her son from prison saying, "Dear Ma, I've done what I could about your garden. Plant your seeds."

When we think there's nothing much we can do, Jesus told us there is much. When we come to think there is no way, Jesus tells us if there's a will there is a way. When it gets to the point that we don't know and we don't care, Jesus reminds us that if we knew what he knew, and we can know it, if we knew what he knew, and we can, then we would care, and if we cared, there is much more we would know. Communion is less about the way we serve the bread or how it's sliced, it's less about whether it's wine or Welch's, it's less to do with the proper words and a prescribed script spoken with unction and a holy intent. It's all about the people who come to the table striving to discover what we bring to the table when we come. Jesus had a way of breaking through the complacency of his disciples and the apathy of all people who would hear him out. He invited himself to dinner, and he said to all of us, "What do you bring to the table?"

Sometimes we do get paranoid, paralyzed, and we are neither hot nor cold. Sometimes we find ourselves indifferent to everything, especially to apathy, which we are neither for nor against. And in times like these, we can imagine an irritated God so annoyed by our lukewarmness, and here comes Jesus telling us, "Get out of the boat if you don't like where you're drifting." Conversion. "Do you hear me knocking?" And just as sure, on the first Sunday of every month, here comes the risen Christ, asking us, "I'll meet you at the altar. What do you bring to the table?" Communion. "Do you hear me knocking?" And Jesus, the one we call the Christ, the one we said had risen two weeks ago, as we

remembered Easter, the one who is alive in our world, and in our hearts, he says, “Look, I stand at the door and knock. Do you think maybe you could get up and open it? I’d appreciate that.”