

November 20, 2022

Hot, Cold, and Everything In-Between

Revelation 3:14-22

On the north side of Turkiye's Lycus Valley, hot springs, produce warm, sparking clear streams of mineral water. The water crosses the plateau in channels formed by deposits of calcium carbonate, then spills over the cliff to form a surreal cascade of glistening snowy white calcite rock. The white cliff, a huge "cotton castle" (Turkish, "Pamukkale" – name of the local town) is over 1.5 kilometres long and 100 metres high. The Kings of Pergamum established a spa here; the Romans further developed the vast city of Hierapolis around the springs; it's now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The waters are believed to have medicinal, healing properties. People came here to be restored and healed.

On the south side of the Lycus Valley, icy cold, clear mountain water cataracts into a deep gorge. At the mouth of that gorge, watered by that strong current of pure glacial water, stands the ancient city of Colossae, famous for its refreshing mountain springs.

On the north side of the wide Lycus Valley, the healing, medicinal hot springs of Hierapolis. On the south side, the clear, cold, life-giving waters of Colossae. In the middle, where hot water meets cold, stands Laodicea. There is plenty of water around Laodicea, but it's a tepid temperature and tastes awful (laced with dissolved minerals it's undrinkable).

Jesus is speaking to their local context. If they were hot in their faith, like Hierapolis, they could offer health and healing. If they were cold in their faith, like Colossae, they could offer clear, cold spiritual refreshment. But Jesus says, *"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other. But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth"* (3:15-16).

Laodicea may have had bad water, but they had money. Laodicea, at the crossroads of major highways, flourished was the commercial centre for the region. They were famous for their medical school, especially their eye treatments. They were also famous for their black sheep and fine wool clothing. By their ingenuity and wealth, they engineered a huge aqueduct to bring water from the mountains. One individual financed a stadium, 300 metres long; another built a huge triple gate and towers; another built massive public baths; the city had several theatres. In AD 60 a huge earthquake flattened Laodicea. The Roman Empire offered disaster relief – financial assistance – to help the city rebuild. The Laodicians refused aid. Proud of their wealth, sure of their resilience, they would rebuild the city themselves. They were self-sufficient. They could do anything on their own, thank you very much.

At the same time as this self-financed reconstruction, Jesus says to the church: *"You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing' (as the city just told the Emperor), but you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"* (3:17). They needed no one and nothing. the church, like the city was strong. Independent. They didn't even need the King/God/Jesus/a Saviour.

Jesus goes on, *"I advise you to buy gold from me, gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference"* (3:18-19).

The church didn't need a thing. They were fine on their own. In fact, Jesus is locked out: *"Look! I stand at the door and knock"* (3:20). This verse is used as an evangelistic text of Jesus knocking on non-believers' lives. Or is it? In fact, Jesus is knocking on the door of the church. He's asking His church to let Him in, so He can be Lord and King. So that they can have a life together, sitting at the table, talking, sharing, getting to know one another.

Bringing it forward to today

1. Hot Springs

After a long hard day of life, you need to find a way to relax. Think of spending time in a pool at the hot springs. Or in a hot tub. Or even a hot bath. Or a hot shower.

On a larger scale, in a world where we get bruised and battered by life, where things feel overwhelming, where we cannot manage everything on our own, we need times and places when we can come aside, be healed, and be safe. Here we provide what the Bible calls "sanctuary." Church is to be a place where we can relax. We can be safe. We can find community. We don't have to worry about being judged. Or rejected. Or found wanting.

Most importantly, church is a place where we can meet our Saviour, Jesus. Here we can experience His welcome. His grace. His forgiveness. His healing. His rest. His love.

We experience plenty of judgment in our lives. We know rejection. We feel we have to prove ourselves. We don't feel safe. If a church becomes that kind of a place – a place where we feel judged, rejected, and unsafe – we're a lukewarm version of who we're called to be. We're not going to do much for Jesus. We have little to offer our hurting world.

The church is to be a model of God's love. God's love is not lukewarm. It's hot, offering healing. It's cold, offering renewal. It's unconditional. God doesn't wait until we've got life together before He loves us and welcomes us into His family, the church. He meets us where we are, as we are. He loves us in that place. Then He works on our lives, to restore, renew, and change us. Paul writes, *"God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation"* (Romans 5:8-9).

We need to be that community where people can be themselves. Where there is no judgment. No rejection. Only God's love. God's welcome. God's mercy. God's grace.

"God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." Our church is genuine modelling God's love when we love people, even while we/they are still sinners. Even when we/they've not yet got our lives together. When we meet people where

they are, as they are. We love people there. We welcome fellow not-yet-perfect people into the family. We know God's mercy and grace and we want to model God's mercy and grace.

"God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us" (1 John 4:9-12).

This isn't an easy love. It's not a tepid, lukewarm love. It's hard work. It's uncomfortable. It moves us out of our comfort zone. It's the kind of unconditional love God modelled. As that love was costly to God, it can be costly to us, too. That's who the world needs us to be.

2. Cold Water

You've just run a race. You're hot and exhausted. A cold drink would be so satisfying. A lukewarm drink just isn't going to cut it. Spiritually there are times when we're exhausted. We're tired. We need a long, cool, drink of spiritual refreshment.

In John 4, Jesus meets a woman at a well. She is a woman: a Jewish man on his own should not speak to her. She is a Samaritan, the Jews are sure God couldn't possibly love her. She is a woman with a past, married five times and now living, unmarried, with man number six. This is someone the good religious folks are absolutely certain God couldn't possibly love.

Because of her issues, she comes at noon. No one else would be there approaching the hottest time of day. Jesus asks her for a drink. The woman pushes back: *"You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan and a woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"*

Jesus replied, *"If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water ... Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life"* (John 4:9-14).

Wouldn't it be great to have a bubbling spring of pure, clear, cool, refreshing water, giving us eternal life, today and forever?

Most of us have had times when we've experienced God in profound and meaningful ways. We have really "felt" God's presence. Perhaps through music. Perhaps in prayer. Perhaps in creation. We have known Jesus with us. And that experience of meeting with Jesus moves us, renews us, and restores us. It's like a tall, glass of cold water, refreshing our soul.

When this woman met Jesus, she MEETS Jesus. She finds the cool, refreshing, living water she needs – unconditional love, mercy, forgiveness, and healing – a new start – with Jesus. And she knows Jesus is that safe Person she can then invite people to meet. If He can love her, He can love anyone. *"She left her water jar beside the well and ran to the village, telling everyone, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the*

Messiah? People came streaming from the village to see him” (John 4:28-30).

We have this good news of great joy for the world around us. We have a Saviour who offers all people – yes, absolutely everyone – unconditional love, mercy, forgiveness, and healing. A new start. This is our gospel. Our message. This is the hope we offer our parched world.

The church is a place of sanctuary, healing, refreshment, and renewal. Here we are restored and healed. Here we are welcomed, refreshed, and renewed. We don't just stay here. Now we can tell everyone that we have met the Messiah. We have met someone who loves us and heals us. We bring Jesus' love, healing and hope to our family, friends, and neighbours.

3. Jesus stands at the door and knocks

Jesus stands at the door and knocks (3:20). Do you need His rest? His healing? His care? His love? Do you need a fresh, bubbling spring of spiritual renewal, giving eternal life?

God does love us and welcome us. He CAN heal us, restore us, and give us new purpose and passion in life. Invite Jesus in. Invite Him in to be your guide, mentor, teacher, counselor. Jesus talks about this as sitting down to dinner and spending time talking, sharing, learning, and living together (*"I will come in and eat with that person and they with me"* (3:20)). When Jesus is central in our lives, when the Holy Spirit guides our lives, we stop trying to do it all ourselves. We let our Saviour renew us. We let our Creator give us new life.

When we genuinely meet with Jesus, we have something hot (in the best sense) and cold (in the best sense) to share with the world. We have good news of great joy for all people. As Troy reminded us last week, our good news of great joy include these amazing truths:

- You belong with Jesus.
- You belong in His church.

Jesus stands at the door and knocks. What are you going to do?

- Maybe you're hearing about Jesus for the first time, or maybe you've heard about Jesus for years, but you've never invited Him in. Jesus says, *"If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me"* (3:20). Do you need to decide to open the door to Jesus today? Do you want to spend a lifetime getting to know Jesus? Invite Him in.
- Maybe you decided to love Jesus and walk with Him, but over time, you've drifted apart. Your relationship with Him is lukewarm at best. Maybe you need to open the door again and invite him back in: *"If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me"* (3:20). Jesus wants to spend a lifetime sharing life with you. Invite Him back in.