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Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church
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YOU'VE GOT MAIL: OVERCOMING APATHY
Revelation 3:14-22

How many of you remember the sequel movie "Free Willy-Part II?" It's the story of an Orca whale, the family that loved him and the way in which he utterly disrupted their lives. I have another sequel for you: "Free Kitty-Part II." For those of you who missed the first installment last week, it is the story about a pastor who was hounded by his family into acquiring a "free kitty cat." They named her Kit. Within two weeks, Kit had a herniated diaphragm. Everything that used to be in her lower chest cavity had migrated to her upper chest cavity. The vet said she would require major surgery. The wise pastor knew there was really only one good option. He thought to himself, "This is a new cat. We don't have years of relationship built up here. We'll start over with a new, fresh, healthy free kitty." Then the pastor looked into the teary eyes of his daughter Rachel, and discovered the real meaning of powerlessness. So the free kitty--- had the surgery...to the tune of about \$500.

Here's the sequel. Since then, our free kitty has been back into the vet twice for overnight visits. She had fluid in her chest cavity that had to be drawn off...twice. Then the vet, bless his heart, has been taking her home to his house so his daughter can watch her through the night. Kind of a kitty I.C.U. So the bill on our "free kitty" is going up. I suggested to Rachel that we rename her kitty "Whitworth." Because her college fund is fast disappearing.

This morning we come to the end of our series "You've Got Mail" with our last stop at the city of Laodicea. Each week, we have had a piece of mail delivered that illustrated the point of the message. This morning, however, it is a special delivery.

Laodicea lay some 100 miles to the east of Ephesus. It was located on a critical juncture between two important trade routes.

Laodicea was so wealthy that following the devastating earthquake of 60 AD, it was able to rebuild itself without any assistance from Rome. In fact, the Laodiceans prided themselves on three things as a community: great financial wealth, an extensive textile industry, and the production of a popular eye salve, called Phrygian ointment, that was exported throughout the world.

But Laodicea had one major weakness. It lacked adequate water. Laodicea's location was determined by the road system rather than by its water source. So, water had to be brought from springs six miles to the south through a system of stone pipes. By the time the water arrived at Laodicea, it was tepid and foul tasting. Now, knowing these things, see if the text doesn't come to life for you.

As most of you know, I used to live in Bakersfield, California. It's near the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley. But if you drive north on Highway 99 maybe 70 miles, you will come to the town of Hanford, California. Anyone here ever been to Hanford? If you have, there is one thing you will always remember about Hanford. The water stinks. It smells like rotten eggs. When you go to get a glass of water out of the sink and turn on the tap, the rotten egg smell immediately hits you. It makes you sick. When I visited there, I could not bring myself to drink the water. I actually candidated for the presbyterian church in Hanford. Frankly, I was relieved when they decided that I was too young and evangelistic for them because I don't think I could have stood years of that foul, smelly, rotten egg water.

Laodicea was similarly afflicted. They were famous for their wealth. Famous for their fancy eye ointment. Famous for their beautiful textiles. And they were infamous for their lousy tasting, lousy smelling water. And Jesus uses this piece of information to drive home his point to the Laodiceans.

Of all the harsh words Jesus has for the seven churches, I don't think any are as shocking as his words to the Laodiceans, do you? Listen to his harsh rebuke: "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 cold nor hot--I am about to spit you out of my mouth." The word "spit" means, literally, "vomit." I will vomit you out of my mouth. It is by far the most

graphic, the most violent, most distasteful reproof of any to the seven churches.

Do any of you remember the name David Cash? Maybe not, but when I tell you his story, you will remember it. David Cash was the 19-year-old Cal Berkeley sophomore who watched his friend, Jeremy Strohmeyer attack a 7-year-old girl in the ladies restroom of a Nevada casino, but walked away without trying to stop the attack or report it. The little girl was sexually molested and strangled to death. Strohmeyer was charged with murder, kidnapping and sexual assault. David Cash was charged with nothing because he was just a witness. In an interview he said, "I'm not going to get upset over someone else's life. I just worry about myself first."

Does that make you sick? It does me. It makes me sick that someone would perpetrate such an act on a little girl. I think it makes me even more sick that another person could stand by, watch such a thing occur and not do anything about it. As horrific as the criminal act was, I think I can almost understand the vicious barbarity of such an act more than I can the vicious indifference of one who doesn't even care.

What is it that causes Jesus to want to spit the Laodiceans out of his mouth like he would their smelly, rotten, lukewarm water? Is it the idolatry of the Pergamum church? Is it the immorality of the Thyatiran church? Is it the hypocrisy of the Sardisian church? No. Apparently, it is something far worse. Apathy. Indifference. Nothingness. They just didn't care.

Do you understand why Kit is our visual parable this morning? Because when her diaphragm ruptured, everything in her lower chest cavity slid forward. Suddenly she looked like a champion weight lifter...a complete toothpick around her waist and a buff chest about twice normal size. When I looked at the first X ray, we couldn't even find her heart. It was crowded up by the rest of her organs. And down in her gut, where everything should have been...she had nothing. Apparently, that describes the Laodiceans perfectly. As far as Jesus was concerned, they had nothing inside. Nothing. They didn't particularly care. They didn't love him passionately. They didn't hate him passionately.

They just didn't care. They could take him or leave him. No big deal. Apathetic. Blasé. Whatever. Yadadadada.

"You are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other. But because you are neither, but lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth." Do you realize what Jesus seems to be saying? He is saying, "I would prefer that you love me passionately. But I would rather you hate me passionately than to treat me with indifference. Love me or hate me. But don't ignore me. Don't feel "nothing" towards me."

Is it hard to hear that Jesus would prefer that we despise him passionately than that we tolerate him indifferently? But when you think about it, it makes sense. Because love and hate really aren't so far apart from each other. The opposite of "I love you" is not "I hate you." It is "You know, I don't really care what you think. I don't really care how you feel. I don't really care about you, period."

These are the worst words a wife can hear. Worse even than words of hatred. Because at least hatred has passion. Often hatred grows out of scorned or misused love. When we discover our beloved is cheating on us with another person, after a period of mourning and pain, that love can turn to hatred. Not because the person doesn't care any more. But precisely because the person cares so intensely. When I am counseling a couple, I would far prefer to have two people screaming in anger at each other in my office. At least that tells me they still care about something. It is when I look over and see the dead look in the eye of one of the partners...and silent lips...the look of indifference...the look of apathy...it is then that I know the marriage is truly in trouble. Because someone doesn't care anymore.

Love can pretty easily turn to hatred. And by the way, the opposite is true, too. How many of you women ended up marrying a man who, when you first met him, you swore to yourself, "I wouldn't marry that guy if he was the last man on earth?" Don't raise your hand.

No one wants to be irrelevant. Ignored. Not even us pastors. Especially not us pastors.

Do you know what my favorite type of response is to a Sunday worship service? It shouldn't be too hard to imagine. I love it when I hear, "God touched me Sunday morning" or "Your sermon spoke right to where I am" or "I was so convicted by the Holy Spirit" or "During the worship experience I felt like I was in the presence of Jesus."

Do you know what my second preferred type of response is? "I am so angry I don't think I am ever coming back here again" or "How could you say such a thing? You are so rigid" or "What gives you the right to tell us how we are supposed to live?" Although such responses aren't particularly encouraging, at least they tell me that someone is listening. That they are struggling. They have some passion...some conviction. They are alive.

I prefer love and adoration. Who doesn't? But I will settle for anger and disgust.

Now, do you want to know the worst thing you can say to me as you walk out of that door and shake my hand? "That was a nice sermon." Nice? I don't want to preach "nice" sermons. I want to preach sermons that comfort, encourage, convict, challenge, frustrate, delight, exhort, edify, prophesy or vilify. But I don't want to preach something that is "nice." "Nice," to me, is an indifferent word. It is a polite word. It is a socially acceptable word. It is an apathetic word.

When we come together on a Sunday morning, we are coming into the presence of the living God! We are worshipping the risen Christ. Whatever Jesus is to us, I don't think "nice" cuts it. Think about the image of Jesus in chapter 1. Hair white as a welder's fire. Blazing eyes that look into your soul. A two-edged sword that springs forth from his mouth like a giant stiletto. Whatever that vision is, it ain't nice!

Apparently, Jesus would prefer passion...even idolatrous passion...that he can redirect towards himself rather than cold, blasé indifference, the fire of which can never be relit. One of the most dangerous aspects of being a part of a church--or maybe a student at a wonderful Christian college-- is the temptation to think that you have made it spiritually. That now you can kick

back in your religious easy chair. You've got the God-thing taken care of. Now you can just kind of float along.

Jesus says, "I despise that. When I look upon lukewarm followers of me...tepid, indifferent, apathetic folks who claim that I am Lord but who really don't care what I have to say to them...it makes me nauseous. It makes me want to throw up." Wow! If that doesn't frighten you just a little bit, you aren't paying attention. I know that I sat there, as I was writing this, thinking about my own Christian life. Here I have been a follower of Jesus for over forty years. Is it possible that I have settled into a lukewarm, blasé attitude in my own faith? How about you? Is there no one here this morning that finds their spirit squirming under the conviction of Jesus' words to them?

So how did the Laodiceans become so apathetic? Because they didn't think they needed anything Jesus had to offer. They were independent. Self-sufficient. Laodicea was prosperous. It had everything it needed. To the church at Smyrna Jesus said (2.9), "I know your afflictions and your poverty---yet you are rich!" To the Laodiceans, he says just the opposite. "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.'" Do you remember what the Laodiceans prided themselves on? Their great wealth, their famous eye ointment and their beautiful textiles. Isn't interesting that Jesus attacks them right at their point of greatest strength when he says, "You are poor...you are blind...and you are naked."

It is coincidental...or perhaps providential...that this text lands on the Sunday of our Stewardship banquets. But it serves as a graphic reminder of the dangers we face as wealthy Gig Harbor Christians. The more we have, the more successful we are, the more we acquire, the easier it is to forget how utterly dependent we are on Jesus. The easier it is to forget that, in fact, we TOO are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked and that we are delusional if we think that we can take care of ourselves without the loving, saving, compassionate initiative of Jesus Christ into our lives.

Now, how about some gospel? Some good news. Here it is: Jesus didn't spit them. Did you notice? He says, "I am about to

spit you out of my mouth." Ah, so there is hope. What is the alternative, then? What does Jesus want from us? We discover his desire for us in those beautiful words of verse 19: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

What does Jesus want from us? Instead of lukewarm indifference, he wants intimate relationship. The parting image of Jesus is not him angrily spitting them out of his mouth. Rather it is Jesus as he patiently stands, knocking, knocking, knocking on the door of their hearts. Begging them to invite him in so that he might sit down to a wonderful supper with them.

Back to Kit one last time. Before her surgery, when we could not even find her heart on an X ray, Kit was the perfect little cat. She came to you when you called her. She just sat on your lap and gasped for air, struggling for every new breath. You cannot imagine the difference in the X rays after the surgery. There was her little heart, right where it belonged, with plenty of room to beat and grow. And you cannot imagine the difference in her behavior. Now when I call her, she doesn't come. She hides under the sofa or the bed or whatever else she can squeeze under and makes me stuff a pillow under to chase her out. When I don't want her, she jumps up on my lap while I'm working on my computer and puts her little paws all over my little buttons. Last night as I studied, she was going crazy on the couch next to me: Ears folded back like she's a mountain lion, attacking this pillow, that window. Flipping herself all over the place. In short, she is acting like a kitty should act.

I wonder who here this morning is having trouble finding their spiritual heart. When it comes to your relationship with Jesus, you are lethargic, disinterested, going through the paces. If you would dare to say to Jesus, "I hear you knocking. Please come in. Please come inside of me, rearrange me, set my heart free so that it can pound for you..." I'll bet you would be amazed at the difference in your spiritual life.

**SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
OVERCOMING APATHY
Revelation 3: 14-22**

Pastor Mark Toone
November 7, 1999

- Compare the "reproofs" in the other six letters. Which do you find to be most harsh? Why? Note which churches receive no words of correction. Why do you think this is so?
- Notice verse 15: Jesus says, "I know your deeds..." and yet he continues to say, "You are neither cold nor hot." Why the change of subject? Why doesn't he say, "I know your deeds ...they are neither cold nor hot." In what way are our deeds "us?"
- How can wealth lead to spiritual indifference? How does Jesus drive the point home in his description of who they really are? (v. 17)
- What do verses 19 and 20 mean to you? What does it mean to be rebuked and disciplined by the Lord? Why does he follow such a statement with one like we find in verse 20?
- Please pray. Pray for spiritual vitality in this church. Pray that God will cause the hearts of all of us to be set free to passionate discipleship. Please continue to pray for the finances of the church and stewardship season, that God will inspire his people to support those things which he deems worthy and timely.