

Sunday 6th May 2018
Easter 6 (B) Choral Evensong

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Song of Solomon 4.16-5.2;8.6,7
NT: Revelation 3.14-end

The image on the front of our service sheet this evening is of the painting by the English Pre-Raphaelite artist [William Holman Hunt](#) (1827–1910) representing the figure of [Jesus](#) preparing to knock on a door – notice the symbolism that the artist placed into the painting the Halo, Crown of Thorns, Jesus’ Hands, The Priestly Robe and clasp. The Door overgrown and long-unopened, the door represents the door of our lives. Jesus knocks on the door and waits patiently for us to open it up.

Crucial to the painting is that the door has no handle. The only way for it to be opened is from the inside. Holman Hunt in this painting interpreting the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:20, in fact the painting has the inscription beneath it, the key to understanding the whole painting.

The original words of Revelation were written in Greek and some of their meaning is lost in a direct translation into English. A more literal reading would be, “Here I am! I have been standing (for a long time) at the door and I am constantly knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

The book of Revelation opens with seven letters. Each of the seven letters addresses a different church in Asia Minor, the third letter is to the Christians who live in a city called Laodicea and it is the letter which contains the images which led Holman Hunt to create the painting “The Light of The World” an image of a loving patient Jesus waiting for a response to his knocking, yet it also contains the challenging words at verse 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

Some versions suggest vomit rather than spit. I don't suppose there are many pre-raphaetic paintings of a vomiting Jesus

Think about this: Here is the same Jesus who calls little children to sit with Him, who teaches us to care for the poor and who offers rest to the spiritually and emotionally weary. And He says to this body of Christians, "I am about to spit you out of my mouth." Jesus' words are shocking.

So what was it about the Church in Laodicea that produced such a response

Historians tell us that the city of Laodicea, near what's now the Turkish city of Denizli, received hot water from about five miles away. The water came through pipes, using a system pioneered by the Romans. But unlike our water-heating systems, the heat wasn't localized—

it started hot, but after five miles in a pipes that were more and more clogged up with calcification, very little heat remained. Still, their water wasn't cold or fresh.

So this concept of lukewarm water isn't a random. Not to Laodiceans. Rather Jesus makes his point to these Christians by drawing from their daily reality.

Laodicean water was lukewarm, and this presented a problem: Their water was useless.

New Testament scholar Thomas R. Schreiner explains it like this:

[The Laodicean Christians'] works are neither hot nor cold but lukewarm. It has often been pointed out that both cold and hot water are good. Cold water is refreshing when you are sweating and unbelievably thirsty. If you run five miles on a hot day or come in from working in the yard, cold water is a tonic to your system. In the same way, hot water in tea or coffee or for bathing is soothing and comforting. But lukewarm water is disgusting. It doesn't refresh you nor does it soothe.

If you have ever left a bottle of water all day in your hot car, or you've smelled a stagnant puddle lingering after a heavy rain. This kind of water is gross and—worse—good for nothing. And Jesus says the believers in Laodicea are like their water.

Many of us hear, the description of “lukewarm” as representing Christians halfway between full-on unbelief and a kind of sold-out, devout Christianity. But that doesn't match what we read in Revelation. The “spectrum” Jesus presents only includes two points: those who follow Jesus and those who don't.

Jesus isn't calling the Laodicean church “less devout,” and encouraging those Christians to be more on fire for him. He's calling them unbelievers. Jesus says, “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.

We don't know a lot about the Laodicean Christians. According to Jesus, they thought highly of themselves, and they considered their wealth to make them self-sufficient. Of course we wouldn't use these terms, but we don't need to search far for examples of how wealth and a self-sufficient approach to faith characterize Western Christianity, even if the particulars differ from Laodicea.

“Lukewarm” describes water you can't use for washing or drinking, for cooking or refreshment. Jesus uses the terms to describe a group of Christians who thought they were what Jesus knew they were not.

The critical question, then, is: Would Jesus use “lukewarm” to describe our churches—or us?

“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.”

If we are willing to open our doors to Jesus knocking will he receive a lukewarm welcome.

Fr Bill Addy