INTRODUCTION

**20** Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me.

There are two things that come to mind when I read this passage this week, and this verse in particular. The first is the old hymn “Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling.” A hymn that I can hear my grandmother singing and humming, a hymn that I heard during family funerals growing up, sung acapella.

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
calling for you and for me;
see, on the portals he's waiting and watching,
watching for you and for me.

*Come home, come home;
you who are weary come home;
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
calling, O sinner, come home!*

A hymn of intimacy, of desire, of humility and love between God and human. The second thing that came to mind is that painting by Werner Sallman, “Christ at Heart’s Door.” If you have spent any time in churches over the past 30 years you likely have seen it on the walls of sanctuaries, Sunday school classrooms, fellowship halls, minister’s studies, and in church folks living rooms. The picture is of a pale Jesus, with luscious locks, wearing a long, luminous robe. He has a gentle look on his face, and his hand raised to the wooden door gently knocking. For many, it evokes the sense of Christ wanting to enter a person’s heart, but only if invited.

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THE TEXT & INTERPRETATION

To be sure, from a theological point of view, Christ is surely calling us and wants to be in our hearts. After all, in biblical symbolism, the *heart* is not just a place associated with emotion but is the center of the self. The Operations Center where thought and feeling come together to shape the values and practices of our lives.

But our passage from Revelation *does not* actually mention the heart. Moreover, the painting and that well-loved hymn, actually misses a key element of the text. You see, John (the author of this passage) does not have individual people in mind. You see he’s visualizing, relaying God’s message to a *group* of people. In fact, for the last two chapters (chapter 2 and 3) John has recorded what he believes to be God’s message to seven churches. Laodicea is the location of the seventh church. And John is communicating that Jesus the Christ wants to come into the church (as community) and eat with the church through the sacred meal. The door at which Jesus is knocking, is not that of the individual’s heart, but the door of the community. The door of the church, a group of people that has taken the name Christian because they have committed to follow the ways of the Christ.

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LINK TO STEWARDSHIP

Church today is Stewardship Sunday, and it is a celebration as we dedicate our gifts and pledges for another year of ministry together. This is the day when, rather than simply look back at all the things we have already accomplished, instead is a time to focus our vision forward, on the road ahead. Adjusting not only our eyes to see where God is at work *out there* but tuning our ears to hear the knock at our door, the door of the church, to discover what work God has for us to do. “Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling…” not only to you and me, the devotion of our individual hearts, but that call is to our community here at St Andrew.

Today is the day when we pool our resources because we sense that ‘yes,’ God is still speaking to *this* particular community of faith, at Saint Andrew. Guiding us into new, uncertain, and even scary directions.

Today is the day when, though we may feel that our contributions are inadequate, we trust in the power and transformation that can occur when we work together.

Today is the day when we recommit to a life of faithfulness to the Christ-Way, King-dom Way, in a world that routinely values self-promotion, self-aggrandizement and self-enrichment.

Today is the day when, although the road ahead is uncertain and we may struggle as individuals to hear the faint, gentle knocks at the doors of our hearts, that we rely on the eyes and ears of the community of faith to support and carry us into a new day.

Today is the day when we give what we can of our tithes, our time and our talents, we offer them up to the community that seeking to serves others, pray together and extend love far beyond the walls of the church.

THE TEXT & THEIR CONTEXT

The prophet John, who wrote the Book of Revelation, lived in the last decade of the first century, in the Roman empire which levied heavy taxes, enforced a strict class system which relied on the exploitation of those below, and maintained ‘peace’ by means of threat and violence. John, an apocalyptic theologian, presents the Roman Empire as the epitome of unfaithful stewardship by using its resources to support idolatry, injustice, exploitation, and violence.

From John’s point of view God has revealed, through Jesus, the new heaven, and the new earth. And John writes the Book of Revelation, then, for two related purposes. One is to strengthen and encourage those in the church who are faithful to God’s new creation, one in which (as is states later in the book, in chapter 21:3-4) God would dwell in fullness with humankind, and God will “wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death would be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore…” “Look…” the passage continues, “See, I am making all things new!”. The first reason that John records these visions to seven church is to strengthen the church and encourage the community that the Kingdom-things in which you are investing do have value if they are contributing to the new creation and open the door to what God is calling you to do.

The other reason John writes the Book of Revelation is to urge those who are colluding with Rome to repent, that is, to “Come out” of the empire. Unplug from the systems that rely on exploitation and violence and a ‘me-first’ mentality. John was not naïve; he also knew that many people in the church were unfaithful. That they cooperated and compromised with the Roman empire too. That, although they may have perceived themselves as loyal to God and faithful to Jesus, that, as verse 17 revealed, they may not have an accurate view of themselves.In John’s reckoning, they were not exercising faithful stewardship of their personal or communal resources, instead they were complicit with the unfaithfulness of Rome.

US & OUR CONTEXT

Friends, we are not in the same position as Laodicea, but we do live in a culture that powerful shaped our values and perceptions of what is right and good.

The church needs to be a faithful steward of its allegiance. The church needs to be a faithful steward, with all that it has…this building (as Lori mentioned last week), our collective power when we vote and participate in civic duties, our volunteer capacity, our ability to donate and pool together physical resources for the benefit of others. Faithfulness in stewardship, in the 21st-century is a lot different than in the 1st-century, but the goal is the same. Remember our verse,

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And when we pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” what we are doing, in essence, is hearing that knock at the door of our community. We are together, electing to open that door –with all the unforeseen challenges that it may unleash– and TOGETHER we invite Jesus, the Christ into our midst. We invite the Way of living that he demonstrated on earth. We invite healing, wholeness, mercy, and forgiveness in. We invite discomfort, inconvenience, and illogical. We invite love, compassion and foolishness. The kind of foolishness that this revelation about a new heaven and a new earth is possible, that the Kingdom of God can come, that God has extended open arms to all of humankind, invited all of us, even the most broken and screwed up to be a part of making this new vision a reality. What a challenging and interesting thought on a Sunday following our national elections? That we could actual making a difference in the world –to alleviate the suffering of others and allow for another flourishing– if not individually, then collectively.

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Does this image of Jesus knocking on the door of the church resonate with you at all? Do you have a sense that there is something more to be done? A sense of a higher calling, a greater purpose, a communal responsibility? Are you compelled by the hope of transformation, not just internally and individually, but communally as a church and a city? Is there something, a vision, an energy, an idea, a hope that calls you? Calls *us*?

Because if there is, and you are convinced that even a congregation like ours, can play a small (yet significant) part in making that happen, then a pledge to the church can be a vote in favor of a new world.

CONCLUSION

But of course, it doesn’t stop with dropping of your pledge. You are then invited to put skin in the game, to play an integral part in building the new world that John envisioned and that Jesus lived out. You will be called to work alongside people you disagree with, on projects that you didn’t initiate, or on tasks that you would have done differently, BUT you do that because it is the ‘door of the community’ that Jesus knocks. And it is only as a community that we can face the difficult decisions, and contentious relationships with the empire, that life “in the Way of Jesus,” can ultimately create.

However, the great promise of Revelation 3:20 is that Jesus will come into the community: God will be with them as resurrecting presence as they navigate the future. “I will come in and eat with you, and you with me.” And so, may this sacred meal, the love feast between the Divine and the human, this sacrament of Holy Communion with Creator and Creature, may you feel the tangible presence of God in this room, in this community and in your own spirit.

**20** Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me.

Amen.