

## A Call to Contemplation

8:00 a.m. Worship on Sunday, September 18, 2022 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Revelation 3:20 “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

Introduction: Contemplative prayer is vital

“The story is told of Mother Theresa that when an interviewer asked her. “What do you say when you pray?” she answered, “I listen.” The reporters paused a moment, then asked, “Then what does God say?” and she replied, “He listens.” It is hard to imagine a more succinct way to get at the intimacy of contemplative prayer.”\*

Contemplative prayer often, but not always, involves silence and it is hard to maintain a habit of such activity and the midst of a culture designed to keep us as busy as possible. But because of the fast pace of our lives, times of quiet prayer, always essential, become almost a matter of life and death, at least spiritual life and death, for the Christian. That is the point of this invitation to prayer given by Jesus to the church in Revelation 3:20.

Set the stage: Laodicea, the lukewarm church

To set the stage, our passage is in the early chapters of the enigmatic Book of Revelation, the vision of what was and is and will be written after the Apostle John had his vision of heaven. The book begins with instructions and corrections from the Lord Jesus to the communities of Christians in various regions of the Roman Empire near Turkey and Eastern Europe. In the later portion of chapter three, the Lord directs His attention to the Christians of Laodicea, a prosperous city known for its high-quality dye and clothing business and for the excellent eye salve produced there. The people of that city have one of the most comfortable lifestyles of any place in the Roman Empire, but Jesus gives the church of that region low marks and tells them that their spiritual state is poor. They are lukewarm, not hostile, or disobedient to Christ but lacking in any passion or zeal in their devotion. Their life as disciples has become dull and routine. They are not growing and that is not acceptable to their Savior. It is in this context that Jesus says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

Main Point: The invitation and the implied risk of ignoring

The statement probably would have been heavy with meaning to someone living in that day and age. The Old Testament book, Song of Solomon, is an allegory (it is several things) about the love of God for the nation of Israel. People back then often thought of a Sovereign as “married” to the nation and it was not a great leap to

think of the love of God for the people being like the love of a good husband toward his wife. Here's a sample:

Song of Solomon 5:2 "I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, 'Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.'"

Well, who wouldn't open the door if the love of their life was knocking, but the Christians of Laodicea were apparently too busy being prosperous to stop long enough to open the door by spending time in prayer. That what I think is meant by opening the door. But there is another side to this image, one that goes beyond that of the Lord being the one who loves His people. The image of the Lord knocking on the door is also found in James and the emphasis is different from Revelation. James 5:9 says this: "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" Here the brother of Jesus, warns the church to avoid the sad spiritual state the is evidenced by grumbling and complaining (look at Israel wandering in the desert of the Sinai is you want to see examples of what God thinks of grumbling. The Judge stands at the door and He can hear everything you say. Open the door. Pray. Watch what you say.

Application: There has got to be time where you are just quiet before the Lord. That is basically the application for today's sermon. There has got to be time when you are quiet before the Lord in prayer. It more than a matter of asking for His help. Prayer changes us and helps us grow and the lack of prayer will show up in our spiritual lives and in our relationships with one another. The people of Laodicea were rich in appearance, but Jesus say people who were poor and weak because they kept the door closed. They didn't pray.

### Conclusion

Jesus, in this famous verse of Him standing at the door and knocking, invites us to prayer. I believe prayer, including contemplative prayer in which we are simply quiet before the Lord, is a way to open that door. The life of prayer is key to a deep and healthy spiritual life and the Lord expects us to prayer both because He loves us and also because we are accountable to Him. Even if it is just for a short time each day, take the time to open the door and pray.

\*<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/contemplative-prayer>

— Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies