

It was either on the Today Show or NBC nightly news this past week – a segment on portions of the economy that are growing. Any guesses? Medical! Fast foods! Well, medical was one, not sure about fast foods. The one that caught my eye though was fortune tellers. Those who read astrological charts, tea leaves, etc. Those who gaze into the future and give some assurance that things are going to get better down the road. We long for a better tomorrow; we want to know what is going to happen. We want the assurance that a better day is coming.

The congregation at Laodicea is not worried about the future. They are content right where they are. They think they are hot but in reality they are only lukewarm.

I always think about my mother when I read this letter. She wanted things hot or cold. There was no lukewarm in her taste buds. I am sure she would have loved microwave ovens. Although I doubt if we could keep her supplied with them. I can see her keeping one on the table so she could put in her coffee cup between each sip to make sure it was still hot!

The congregation at Laodicea is lethargic, lukewarm. They take no risks or chances. Things are going good so why rock the boat. They are set for life – why go out and change things when things are perfectly okay the way they are. They had made a decision and so wanted to let others make up their own minds, we don't have to witness or do ministry. Our doors are open, anyone is welcome. They think they are hot but in the eyes of the living Christ they are lukewarm – the type of lukewarm you want to spit out. They have deceived themselves into thinking that all is well. There are no challenges to their faith, no persecution – they are comfortable in their recliners – all is well.

The image given is of the living Christ standing before the congregation wanting to be let in, “behold I stand at the door and knock.” I want to look at this just a little differently. What if Christ is standing at the door inviting them to come and join him in ministry and outreach? Christ has an opened door before him and the question is: are they willing to get out of their lethargy and follow him? This is Christ's invitation to the congregation to move from being lukewarm to becoming hot again in service and ministry. Rather than do nothing let's take a chance and do something. See! Before you are open doors to ministry.

Now I chose Elijah because for me Elijah is just the opposite of the congregation in Laodicea. He is where he is because he has been doing something. He has won a great victory over the prophets of Baal and has seen a seven year drought end. One can say that he has not been lukewarm in his service to God and now Jezebel seeks his life. As he hides in the cave a strong wind storm passes by – and God is not in the wind. An earthquake shakes the mountain (now why he stays in the cave in an earthquake I don't know) but God is not in the earthquake. Then a fire comes and still God is not in the fire. Now this is significant because in other Old Testament text God is present in the wind, the earthquake and fire. These are where God is supposed to be and it is a striking statement that God is found in any of these.

And then, the *New Revised Standard Version* says it so powerfully, “in the sound of sheer silence” there God is. God is there with a question for Elijah, “Why are you here?”

“Well, God, I have been very zealous for you and I have accomplished some great things but now I am the only one left and they are seeking my life also.”

Now did you notice God's response? **"Go!"** God has another task or two for Elijah to do. This is not the time to be sheltered in a cave, hiding. This is a time to continue the work that he has begun. This is the time to anoint others to carry on Elijah's work. This is the time to renew the presence of God. And, Elijah is informed that he is not alone – "Yet, I have reserved seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him" (18). Elijah is not alone. There is work to continue doing – to Elijah, **"GO!"**

What is our temperature? It is not as easy to determine as we might think. Which one of these seven letters best tells our story? All probably speak or should be speaking to us. We need to understand that just as these seven congregations are unique, so are we. Our God is a creative God and we are made in the image of that creativity.

I was in a small group with Lee Strobel a few years ago. We were squeezed into the pastor's study and were in dialogue with Lee, who was at that time on the staff of a major mega congregation. The one thing I remember him saying is that the last thing we should be doing is trying to copy what this mega congregation is doing. The congregation is unique and the ministry they are doing will probably not be able to be duplicated in another part of the country.

Rick Warren of the Saddleback Community Church has basically the same message. You cannot duplicate the ministry of Saddleback because Saddleback is in a unique location with unique opportunities for ministries. It is located in one of the richest parts of the United States – for a long time they believed there was no poverty in the area where they are located. Finding there is hunger and poverty in the area they have committed themselves to working to alleviate hunger in their neighborhood, where they live. Christ has put before them an open door and they have accepted the challenge to move out into new areas of ministry and service.

The implication from both of these is that we are to find our own creative niche in the world and go and do the ministry God has called us to do. We are not to sit back on the laurels of the past but go forward into tomorrow where Christ is leading. Creativity should be our number one goal, for our God is a creative God.

True or False: April Fool's Day grew out of the church? No one wants to answer? A couple hands for "yes". One for "no". Well, it is true. This was a day when it was okay to make fun of the bishop and church leaders. Clowning sprouted forth from within the church – a way to share the Gospel. Our God is a creative God and loves our creativity.

We come here today with the assurance of our future. Now we may not know just exactly how things will turn out. There will be bumps and roadblocks along the way. We will have setbacks and maybe start off now and then in the wrong direction but we have already won. Christ's words to the congregation in Laodicea as he challenges them to open the door to new ministries are, "I have overcome, I have conquered." There is no question about the final outcome – there is no question about the future – Christ has already won! And yet we often act as if we have lost the race/battle. We want to quit at half time because we are so far behind. We think it is better to be lukewarm than cold. But before us Christ has placed an open door to ministry. We are called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and set at liberty the oppressed and to be creative as we do it – it is called a journey of faith.