

## March 26 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

### Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – Christ at the Door

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is Christ at the Door, located in the Narthex, in the center west wall.

The window is one of five that were moved from our former church on Ninth and Court Streets, which was dedicated on May 8, 1900. The window depicts Christ standing at the door of the Laodicean church as shared in Revelation 3:20: 'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.' However, it could also represent any church that can be identified with a faith that is only 'lukewarm' - one which has fallen away from Christ due to their riches and self-sufficiency. Note that the window depicts a door with a 'modern' knob, as doors of Biblical times had only holes through which the key would also function as the handle.

We see Jesus knocking at the door, robed in white representing His sinlessness and cloaked with a tunic of brown and gold, signifying His perfect humility and majestic glory. With a disheartened but compassionate face, Jesus is holding a shepherd's staff, who seeks His sheep that have gone astray as in *1 Peter 2:25* - '*For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*'

The portico appears to be marble with the building constructed of finely worked stone, suggesting a church of great wealth. However, the door is considerably weathered and dried up, possibly symbolizing what is within, i.e., a faith that has withered due to self-sufficiency, complacency, and indifference to spiritual matters, relying only on themselves and not Jesus. Even the building façade shows a black scar suggesting that what is dying inside is starting to show outside.

In the background appears to be a large acacia tree, with foliage of mixed colors from vibrant green to yellow to brown and even black, symbolizing the varying depths of faith that remain in the church. To the right, at the base of the tree is a black mass similar to some patches in the tree that has now fallen, signifying a faith that is dead. The trunk appears to have a hole of rot in its side that has been braced. The condition of the tree is inconsistent with the characteristics of the acacia tree, known for its hardness, durability, rot-resistance and evergreen nature. The acacia tree is mentioned in the Bible, representing resurrection. The tree was used for the construction of the tabernacle in the Old Testament and even elements of the Ark of the Covenant. *Exodus 35:24* says, '*Everyone who had acacia wood for any part of the work brought it.*'

Outside in the light of Jesus, resting on the portico is a flowering plant that appears to be a lily. In the Bible, a lily symbolizes purity, chastity, rebirth, hope, and virtue. Lilies are often referred to as "white-robed apostles of hope" and represent the purity of Christ. In *Luke 12:27*, "*The lilies grow,*" Christ says, "*of themselves; they toil not, neither do they spin. They grow, that is, automatically, spontaneously, without trying, without fretting, without thinking.*"

At the base of the window, four brown pillars are depicted, signifying humility and obedience, which are spoken of in the preceding address to the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:12, with whom Christ found no fault: '*He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.*'

Off in the distance to the right appears to be a boulder and a body of water. The boulder is possibly symbolic of God as in *Psalm 78:35*: *'And they remembered that God was their rock, And the Most High God their Redeemer,'* whom the Laodicean church had forgotten. The water signifies cleansing, as the Apostle Paul writes in *Ephesians 5:26-27*: *'that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.'*

The Revelation to John, the last book of the Bible, is one of the most difficult to understand because it abounds in unfamiliar and extravagant symbolism. The symbolic language, similar to that of the Old Testament, especially Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel, is one of the chief characteristics of apocalyptic literature, which had wide popularity in both Jewish and Christian circles from 200 B.C. to A.D. 200. The perspective is eschatological, i.e., the ultimate salvation and victory are said to take place at the end of the present age when Christ will come in glory at His Second Coming. It presents the enduring message that no matter what adversity or sacrifice Christians may endure, they will in the end triumph over Satan and his forces because of their fidelity to Christ the victor.

The author of the book calls himself John, who because of his Christian faith has been exiled to the rocky island of Patmos, a Roman penal colony. Although he never claims to be John the apostle, he was so identified by several of the early church Fathers. John is also credited as author of the fourth gospel and three epistles of the New Testament. The date of the book in its present form is probably near the end of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81–96), a fierce persecutor of the Christians.

We know that John came from the town of Bethsaida, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. He and his brother James, called the 'Sons of Thunder', were fishermen and the sons of Zebedee and Salome. Jesus called James and John at the Sea of Galilee and immediately, *'they left the boat and their father and followed him.'* As Jesus' disciple, John belonged to the "inner circle". He was present at most of Jesus' personal moments and significant ministries, including His transfiguration, His prayer at Gethsemane, His teachings, and His healing acts. John's friendship with Jesus became deep such that he was known as the 'beloved' disciple. He was the only disciple at the foot of the cross where Jesus asked him to take care of His mother.

John remained in Jerusalem for a number of years, and through his evangelistic efforts, he helped establish the early Christian church. Since John was the last survivor of Jesus' disciples, his enemies tried to silence his testimony and attempt to stop the spread of Christ's doctrine by accusations of false witness and sedition. John was sent to Emperor Domitian in 81 AD. for a trial. Instead of death, the emperor banished John to the Isle of Patmos, a barren rocky island in the Aegean Sea. Here God gave the Book of Revelation to John: *'The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.'* (*Revelation 1:1-3*)

Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation address seven specific churches of that time:

- **Ephesus:** The church had abandoned its first love for Christ, which in turn affected the love they had for others. Jesus told them to repent and do the things they did at first. (*Revelation 2:4*)
- **Smyrna:** The church that would face severe persecution was encouraged by Jesus to be faithful unto death and He would give them the crown of life. (*Revelation 2:10*)
- **Pergamum:** The church that needed to repent of sin was told by Jesus that those who conquered such temptations would receive "hidden manna" and a "white stone," symbols of special blessings. (*Revelation 2:16-17*)

- **Thyatira:** The church whose false prophetess was leading people astray was promised by Jesus that He would give Himself (the morning star) to those who resisted her evil ways. (Revelation 2:24-26, 28).
- **Sardis:** The sleeping church that needed to wake up was instructed by Jesus to wake up and repent. Those who did would receive white garments, have their name listed in the Book of Life, and would be proclaimed before God the Father. (Revelation 3:4-5)
- **Philadelphia:** The church that had patiently persevered was reassured by Jesus with His pledge to stand with them in future trials, granting special honors in heaven, the New Jerusalem. (Revelation 3:10-12).
- **Laodicea:** The church with lukewarm faith was instructed by Jesus to repent and return to their former zeal, vowing to share His ruling authority. (Revelation 3:16, 19-21)

Revelation 3:14–22 is Jesus' final and most strident message, addressed to the church at Laodicea. We learn that the Laodicean church was lukewarm, smug, and self-satisfied, boasting of its wealth and need of nothing. The church had deceived itself - it was spiritually wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Laodicea was the only church of the seven which received only criticism and no positive remarks. Interestingly, Laodicea means “people ruling”, and its church had become swayed by popular opinion, clamor and voting to the point of being self-righteous and self-sufficient, in contrast to God’s ruling in the church and one guided by the Holy Spirit.

Laodicea was in southern Phrygia, midway between Philadelphia and Colosse, and was known as an independent and wealthy city where wool was a major source of commerce. It was positioned in a heavily resourced area and the people who lived there had comfortable lives, priding themselves on their ability to provide for themselves. This self-sufficiency was historically exemplified in the city suffering in the wide-wasting earthquake in the reign of Tiberius, but was repaired and restored by the efforts of its own citizens, without any help asked by them from the Roman senate due to their wealth.

This attitude of self-sufficiency spilled over into the church such that God points out their weakness and tells them they had become useless in a harsh reminder, spurred from love. Revelation 3:15-16 says that the Laodicean church is lukewarm. Hot and cold water are good and useful, but lukewarm water is good for nothing to the point of being *‘spit out’*. The words must have been uncomfortably poignant given that the Laodiceans had built an aqueduct, but the water was lukewarm and impure, such that even today, the remains of thick deposits of calcium carbonate can be seen.

Some may ponder why Jesus would rather have *cold*. However, a *hypocritical* faith is even more shameless than lack of faith. Inconsistency of conviction is more damaging and irretrievable than even wrong conviction. Scripture abounds with the theme of the need for the people to make a clear choice between God or the alternative as in *Matthew 6:24: ‘No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.’*

Revelation 3:18 speaks of *‘buying gold refined in the fire so you can become rich’* contrary to the material gold in which the Laodiceans boasted. The Apostle Peter described *‘genuine faith, approved by the test of fire, as far more precious than gold’* (1 Peter 1:7). Revelation 3:18 also speaks of covering their *‘shameful nakedness’* with white clothes. Laodicea was a great garment manufacturing center, using the black, highly valued wool of the vast flocks of sheep that grazed in the area. Laodicea was prideful of its garment industry and its well-clothed citizens—this adds spiritual pertinence to the reference of *‘nakedness’* - their shame, guilt, and judgment. The verse concludes speaking of salve to put on their eyes due to their blindness, drawing on another aspect of Laodicean pride. The city was a noted medical

center with a famous school at the temple of the Carian god, Men, which produced, an ointment for the eyes. Yet in their pride, the church of Laodicea did not recognize that they were spiritually blind.

The image in Revelation 3:20 of Christ, standing and knocking at the door, would have been familiar to anyone in the culture - an image of someone wanting to come in for dinner. It would have been considered rude and inhospitable to not let them in, a scene telling of the Laodicean church. This is not a picture of Jesus asking to come into the life of an unbeliever but of His followers. The church in Laodicea had become lukewarm such they had given up their pursuit of Jesus, neglecting their spiritual condition. They had disconnected themselves from the vine and were withering, learning the hard lesson that without God it is impossible to produce life.

However, despite the condition of the Laodicean church, Christ has not given up on them – there remains Hope. He is willing and desiring to restore relationship. He is waiting, urging them to turn to Him, as He is positioned outside the church, inviting whoever hears His voice to open the door and welcome Him.

Even though John wrote these warnings nearly 2,000 years ago, they still apply to Christ's church today as He remains the head of the Church, His body, and is Himself its Savior, lovingly overseeing it.

The prophet (*Ezekiel 36:26*) tells us that *'God will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.'* We are reminded in *Proverbs 4:23* that we are to *'keep thy heart with all diligence and vigilance, guard our heart above all else, for out of it are the issues and course of life, from which everything we do flows from it, the springs of life.,*

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(107\) The Father's House - Cory Asbury \(Lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

## Looking ahead – Sunday April 2

Right Narthex Window – Christ the Good Shepherd