

“What Jesus Says to a Troubled Church: ‘All In’”

It's a hard world out there, sometimes, isn't it?

A harsh world.

You're going along minding your own business, and somebody does something, says something that turns you cold.

It was not so much what she did, as what she said, and the tone she used to say it.

What she did was harsh enough.

Yanking her daughter's arm in the Spence Avenue Wal-Mart checkout line like she was a rag doll.

And then, she said it, face twisted in rage,

“You make me sick.”

I paid for my paper plates, my Lance crackers, two Mainstays coffee mugs, took my bag, and determined in my heart as I walked out the door, that I would not set foot in this place again.

And I haven't.

“You make me sick.”

I walked to my car, saying to myself the things I wanted to say and wished, momentarily, I had said.....

To the mother...“no.....you've made me sick....and you're making her sick....

If you treat her this way in public, God only knows what you're doing to her at home.”

To the little girl....some word, some look that said, “Hold on little one, hold on....the whole world is not this way.”

Is that true? Will that be true for her in her world?

Sometimes it feels like the whole world is becoming the Spence Ave. Wal-mart....

“You make me sick.”
You feel that?
It’s awful, isn’t it?

Good thing there's a place in the world like the church....a safe haven from sickening words....because in the church nobody ever says anything mean to or about anybody...

But today, this sickening word does not strike from the serpent mouth of an abusive mother but from the mouth of Jesus.

Today, Jesus says, “You make me sick.”

‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.’”

You hear that?

I remember the first time I heard it....

We were sitting in metal chairs lined up on a concrete floor in a cavernous camp building that was generously called Laurel Hall. The fundamentalist Baptist layman preaching to us quoted this text with a kind of perverse pleasure...

Particularly the part about spewing.

I WILL SPEW YOU OUT.

Listen, he said....

Do you realize what that means....

That means “VOMIT!”

He went into such detail about the word “Spew” that the room fairly smelled like someone had hurled their lunch.

He said that the world was full of people who made Jesus sick....not people who didn't believe in him....they were the cold people....and Jesus wanted to win them....

Not the hot people.....they were the real Christians, on fire for the Lord,

It was lukewarm people who made Jesus sick....so, so sick....

People who claimed to be Christian, but weren't.....people who claimed to follow Jesus, but didn't.....people who practiced a religion called Churchianity and not Christianity.

You don't want Jesus to look at you and say, "YOU MAKE ME SICK!!", do you?

"No sir."

"Be on fire for the Lord!!"

And at the camp closing campfire, one by one, we stood up to testify....that we had come here as insipid, nauseating lukewarm Christians, but we were going home on fire for the Lord.

In today's vernacular, we were going home and going all in.....taking all our chips and pushing them onto the altar....I'm all in....

It's all the rage....

Just Google how many must read business and career books have "Passion" in the title.

There are lots of those kinds of books on the Christian best seller list, too....books with titles like, *Radical, Radical Together, Crazy Love, Not a Fan, Greater, The Irresistible Revolution, Sold Out*.....sold out lock stock and barrel for Jesus,

These books challenge us to sing, "All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give....I surrender all....I surrender all"....and really mean it for a change.

Think what we're singing....

Take my life and let it be consecrated....

Take my silver and my gold.

Not a mite would I withhold!

Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.

Ever, only, all for thee.

All in.

It's a good word for us.

A word to shake us out of our lukewarm lethargy.

We Presbyterians have not been labeled with the moniker, "Frozen Chosen," without reason.

We need to be confronted again and again with the radical demands of the gospel....Jesus saying, "If you would come after me, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.....for whoever saves his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

We need to own up to the truth that our practice of Christianity is often tepid, if we are truthful.

Why, armed with a text like this, I could stand up here and bludgeon you with guilt....and wave the sword of zeal.

I've done that before.

I remember preaching a sermon once, standing in the pulpit, my voice rising....
and pronouncing,

"If your idea of stewardship and Christian discipleship is giving to God your extramural allegiance, giving to him what little time, money, and gifts you have left over after you have done all that you wanted to do....well just don't bother....keep your money, your time for yourself.....he's not interested."

I can just see the face of the Stewardship Committee chairman blanching white....eyes closing....head falling...like the disciples must have when Jesus sent the rich young ruler packing...

It felt good to rail and wail away about half-heartedness and lukewarmness, about people who want their name on a church roll but who won't darken the door or lift a finger to help,

Remember in the Bible, where sister Martha was in the kitchen in Bethany, slaving away to be hospitable to Jesus and the gang....and she just went

off on sister Mary sitting in living room, oblivious to the work that needed to be done....

"Jesus tell my sister to get up off her WHO WHOO and get in here and help me."

That's what that sermon was like...."If all you people would tithe like I do we'd be trying to figure out ways to spend all our money rather than deciding which programs we can cut so that we can keep the lights on."

If all you people would work as hard as I'm work as I'm working, we'd be turning volunteers away...."you want to be on the cleanup committee after family night? I'm sorry there's a three year waiting list."

Oh....it felt good!!!

Looking back now, it was the same word I heard at that fundamentalist's feet...."Your little puny effort you so generously call Christianity is making him sick."

I think about it now, and thinking about it, I believe I can detect an aroma in that room.

I thought it was the aroma of fire and brimstone.....but looking back, I believe it was the aroma of vomit.

Jesus' vomit.

You know what made him sick?

The thing that makes him sickest of all.

Not half hearted discipleship, but big headed zealotry.

There's nothing wrong with ardor, and with zeal.....and God truly knows how much more we need of it.

But far too often, zeal can make us a zealot....a self-righteous zealot....one who looks around and says what I said when I got back home from camp, bought my "Jesus Christ....He's the Real Thing"....t shirt....and came to my "lukewarm" church.

"I'm real....they're not.....they're not real like I am"....

The next sound you hear is Jesus retching.

Do you know the story of the church that had a revival every year...

A revival every year, and every year, at the altar call, a man would come forward, calling out..."Fill me, Lord....fill me!!"

Every year, the same, year after year...

Till one year, finally, one sister leaned over to another and said, "I want to holler don't bother, Lord....He leaks."

The next year I went back to that camp, and when closing campfire testimony time came...I had to say....I went home to be on fire for the Lord.....all in! but I cooled off....But this year, I'm going home and I'm really going to be on fire....

And everybody said the same.

And the next year we came back...it was the same.

You know what the problem is....not only is our water lukewarm, but we leak...that's the truth about us.

Which is why it is a good thing that this passage, and Jesus' word to the churches in Revelation ends with the sound of amazing grace.

The sound of somebody knocking at our door.

Do you know who it is?

It's the one who, when he was checking out, looked down from the cross and saw faces twisted with rage.....heard the multitude shouting...."LOOK AT YOU....YOU MAKE ME SICK!"

And all our sickness poured onto him....sickness unto death.

But he walked out, didn't he?

Walked out off a place far darker than the Spence Road Walmart.....out from a world of people who said to him...."You make me sick."

You know the really amazing thing?

He came back....he came back....and keeps coming back...

He did not say, I never again will set foot in this place, so help me God.

He keeps coming back to me, to you, leaky lukewarm vessels that we are....keeps knocking, seeking.....let me in...

Who would do something like that?

Who would do that?

Somebody who was, and is, and ever shall be truly all in.....the only one who is all in.

There's a verse I love from the Hymn Rock of Ages....

I love it....but it gets left out of many hymnals...

It goes like this:

. Not the labors of my hands
can fulfill thy law's commands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.
Have you heard him knocking and opened the door.....just once? Not
just once....but day after day, hour after hour.....

Open the door....see that from his face, his hands, and his feet sorrow and
love flow mingled down.....

See him more clearly, love him more dearly, that you may follow him more
nearly...not out of guilt that you might make him sick otherwise, but out of
gratitude that there is one who will always be all in.

I opened the door to him, as I wrote this sermon.

He came in, as he promised...

I said, "Sit down....sit down"

"No," he said.

I want you to come with me.

We went out...guess where he took me?

Out of all the places, guess where he took me?

There we were, in line at the Spence Ave. Walmart...

He turns to the wounded child and her abusive mother....and he says,
"Today must be hellish for you and for you....so today, today the groceries
are on me....and here....for you, little one, pick out from these racks of
tempting delights, your own special treat".....

Can you see that?

Can you smell how sweet that is?

My pious, smug walking out smells like vomit.

His love smells like verbena.

What does your life smell like?