

The Power of Weakness

1 Samuel 8:1-10
Revelation 3:14-22

June 10, 2018
Faith Community

Samuel had been a rock star of a leader in Israel's history. A God honoring man, he led the people with integrity and passion, but his sons were not cut from the same cloth. Today's passage tells us,

When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders....But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. (1 Samuel 8:1, 3, TNIV)

The people, understandably, looked for more from their leaders, so they said to Samuel,

You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have. (v. 5)

There was a problem with that, however, a big problem. Israel was to be set apart, not just in its heritage and daily life but in its governance as well. The God who created and delivered them from slavery was to be their king. This request was a slap in the face of their very foundation.

It didn't help when they threw in one of the reasons for their wanting a king which was, "Such as all the other nations have." They were not to be like all the other nations.

It's every kid's ploy and every parent's frustration: "Everyone else is doing it!" Sometimes that's context specific. In my case Mom and Dad came back with, "If everyone jumped off the Mackinac Bridge, would you do it too?" Of course I wouldn't. I wanted to go up in one of those towers, that's what I wanted to do.

This didn't go down well with Samuel who in turn went to God, and heard God say,

Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. (v. 7)

Scroll ahead a bunch of centuries to the New Testament book of Revelation. Chapters two and three are filled with letters to different churches. Today we look at the letter to

the church in Laodicea, which was located in modern day Turkey.

As with so many other places, there were temples galore to any number of deities. It was also a banking center, recognized as a city of great wealth. So secure were they that when most of the city was destroyed in an earthquake, the people refused help from the government and rebuilt entirely at their own expense. Self-sufficiency was a big deal.

There were fashionistas in town as well, making use of woolen cloth and clothing produced from the black wool sheep in the area.

There was a famous medical school there, known for its production of ear medicine and especially a powder used for treatment of eye trouble. So far, everything's looking up in Laodicea.

If there was any drawback about life there, it was its water supply. There wasn't any. Instead, the people depended on hot springs located six miles south of town. It had to be piped in, of course, and by the time it got there it was no longer hot. It wasn't cold, either; instead, it was lukewarm.

And so, there's Laodicea. Reminiscent of its water supply, their letter begins like this:

I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (vv. 15-6, NRSV)

It had great wealth. And here's how this letter addresses the church folk in that city:

For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; (vv. 17-18)

It was a fashion center.

....and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; (v. 18)

It was big in pharmaceuticals.

....and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.
(v.18)

What they saw as reasons to feel safe, secure, and self-sufficient would actually lead them into great harm. And all of a sudden, we're not talking about ancient Israel and Laodicea anymore.

Friends, we have a tightrope to walk. Had you asked the people of the church in Laodicea they'd have told you all was well. Scratch a little below the surface, however and you'd find something much less than that. Some would even say that all those good things would lead to their undoing.

Here's what I know. Oftentimes we're most vulnerable at those places where we think we're strongest or most secure. The most dangerous thing that could happen to you just might be if you were to lose your fire, your passion, your drive. The church at Laodicea was surrounded by a culture in which the people had it made, or so they thought. Over time stinkin' thinkin' like that seeped into the church itself.

These were good people.

Prominent citizens
Community leaders
Prosperous

And instead of allowing it to help sharpen their focus as disciples, people who were becoming more like Jesus in their character and in their emotional and spiritual development, they became lukewarm. This is the danger we face here in Novi.

The people in ancient Israel wanted to be just like everyone else. It led to disaster. The people in the church in Laodicea were self-sufficient high achievers but that's all they were. And perhaps the greatest tragedy of all was that they had no clue as to the dangers they faced. And so,

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. (Rev. 3:20)

It's your move.