

Sermon about Revelations 3, 14-22 on 1st Advent 2022 in Brussels (V)

Greeting: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come.

Bible: 14 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation. 15 “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. 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 eat with him, and he with me. 21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

Sermon: 1. *Change of years:* For us as Christians, the new year already begins today with the first Sunday of the church year. Advent is the time of preparation. On the one hand, we prepare spiritually for Christmas when we celebrate and remember the first coming of our Lord as man in this world. On the other hand, we also relate the preparation to the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Last Day. Are we then prepared to receive our Lord, to meet him? What is needed, perhaps already now? After all, we do not know when that day will be. Maybe today, maybe tomorrow? So, as Christians, we

are at the beginning. The future begins for us now and today. - But as people of this world, the calendar year 2022 is also already coming to an end and in this respect, too, we will begin a new year in a good month. - It is the custom of many people to make various resolutions for the coming year. Let's leave aside the many human resolutions - losing weight, exercising more, calling parents more often, spending more time with the family or whatever. Are there perhaps also "spiritual resolutions" at the beginning of a new church year that we as Christians could or perhaps even should make?

2. *The threshold of decision:* In the passage for the sermon we also find ourselves at a transition. We stand at the threshold of a door. This door is still closed. But there is a knock. We are on one side, inside. The one who knocks is outside, beyond. He presents himself as the one "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation." Those who are biblically trained recognise in this Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the wisdom and the Word of God who gave form to creation. He is the one who was in God "before all time and world", as we confess in the Creed. He is the one who brought God close to us and told us about God, "witnessed" God. The door, the threshold at which we stand, is not simply a front door. It signifies a multi-dimensional transition. It is a transition of time, from our present to the future, but also a transition from time in general to eternity. But it is also the transition between a space without God and a space with God. Thus the doorstep becomes the transition between life and death. Ultimately, the door is also the door to me, my being - some might call it the door of the heart. Will it open for the one standing outside or remain closed? Who or what will find a place inside and who must remain outside? Derived from this, it can then ultimately also be my very own real front door: does Jesus Christ and faith in him find a place in my house, do I live in a Christian house or not?

3. *The sound of true life:* Jesus Christ calls us to listen properly and to draw consequences from this. It is not about letting the gospel of forgiveness, God's love and a new life just ripple along as meditative background music for the soul. It is about turning up the sound of God in one's own life, taking in the rhythm, the lyrics and the statements and living according to it. Because only God, only the one who knocks on the door of your life on the outside, is able to make your life what it should be. Only God sees you as you are meant to be. Only God is the guarantor of life beyond death.

4. *A view into the past:* To make this clear, Christ uses various images full of contrasts in our passage that are foreign to us without background knowledge. For this it is worthwhile to look at the historical and archaeological background. At the beginning of John's Revelation, we find the so-called seven epistles to different congregations of the first Christians, dictated by Jesus Christ himself and written down by the seer John. These churches were all located in Greek-influenced Asia Minor, today's western Turkey. The symbolic number seven and the fact that the congregations are geographically arranged in a circle suggest that, beyond being concrete, personal letters to the respective congregations, they were also intended from the beginning to bring a comprehensive message to the whole Church and all Christians. The time of their writing, which is presumably around the year 135 AD, is only strange to us at first glance, but it certainly has many parallels to our own time. The (then still young) Christian communities are in the absolute minority in their society, which is undergoing great upheaval. The Roman Empire has reached its zenith, which on the one hand causes the Roman emperors to overestimate themselves immeasurably and to have themselves worshipped as gods; on the other hand, the centrifugal forces of the huge empire and the pressure from outside become ever greater and structures and the empire go into a long

decline. Old traditions fade, numerous new religious fashions and exciting mystery cults emerge, promising people at least a temporary escape from their hard earthly lives. The moral concepts of the time are rather decadent and very liberal. The Christians stand out as misfits and do not fit into state and society, which leads to increasing persecution, especially in Asia Minor. Under this pressure, one must remain steadfast in one's faith and confession, even to the point of death if necessary. The city of Laodicea is a rich and important city. It became rich through trade, presumably in expensive black wool and a large spa and medicinal business with hot and cold springs that could be mixed to make pleasantly lukewarm healing waters. The people were able to rebuild the city from its own resources after a devastating earthquake. One can be justifiably proud of oneself and one's achievements. One has everything one needs to live. And also the Christian community is probably even then a larger, richer and significant community in the young church. - But now Christ comes and says clearly: you are wrong! You are not rich at all and you should not imagine anything! You have lost touch with God through your wealth, your economic power, your spa treatments and eye ointments that you sell at a profit and your good life. You have slammed shut the door that was open to you long ago. Wake up, listen and open it again! Your Lord and God has long been there, knocking, calling, speaking to you and wanting to be with you. Don't be stupid and reject that!

5. *How lukewarm is my life?*: It sounds very familiar to me. Specifically, I see an acquaintance in front of me. She has everything you need to live. A happy family, successful children, well cared for despite some illnesses, she is educated, sporty, musical, stands up for the weak and does good. But she has forgotten many things. She calls herself a Christian, but when it comes down to it, she rejects most Christian beliefs. What remains is a general religious do-

gooderism that also easily coincides with all other religions. “We are all equal. Most important is to be a good person.” - But do I only have to point at others? What about my own life? What role does faith in the Lord of life, Jesus Christ, really play in my life, how does that become clear? Do I only imagine myself to be rich, but am spiritually bitterly poor? Where are my points of connection to Jesus Christ? Do I listen to his word, do I read it, do I pray, do I try to live my life in accordance with God's will?

Aim – Good spiritual resolutions: We are at the threshold, at the transition. We will soon begin a new calendar year and already now a new church year. And as Christians we also stand daily at the threshold of God's kingdom. From God's side, this door has long been open again. How does it look from our side? It is time to make good spiritual resolutions in this regard: for example, that in the new church year I want to listen more to the voice that calls me and respond more in prayer and action. The Lord Christ stands ready to live life with us and to celebrate at his table. Let us listen to this voice.

Blessing: And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.