

SARDIS-THE FEEBLE COMPLACENT CHURCH

Sometimes we become complacent about things. You can substitute complacency with: ‘satisfied, self-satisfied, smug, unworried, content, contented, self-righteous, or anxious.’ You know this describes some of our lives and some of the churches we might know. Now being complacent isn’t all bad. Isn’t it nice to be satisfied, unworried, and content? Sure it is. We like that because, well, it just is a nice feeling. You can sit back and relax, and as we know, there is a time for all that. Perhaps God should have added that in his great “There is a Time for Everything under the Sun” Scripture. You know, a time to be content. But you know sometimes we become so complacent, satisfied, smug, unworried, content with our lives and sometimes with our faith that we become, well for a lack of a better word, dead. And we know when we are like that that means old sly serpent can sneak up on you and strike with his forked tongue. Peter writes in his letter to beware of him. You see he is so clever that he changes his costume for Peter says *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...”* In other words, don’t become content or satisfied or smug about your faith. Keep on growing. Keep on running the race God has set before you.

And that brings us to today's church, the church at Sardis. A church that was the center of trade and a military center. It was an impregnable fortress built on a hill. The main religion was the worship of Artemis that built on the idea of death and rebirth. You know a kind of reincarnation thought; you die and come back as someone or something else. Well the Christian church in that town was a glowing church at one time. However, other teachings began to infiltrate the church and now it was a church that was not as alive in Christ as it once was. The church lost its focus, its desire, its first love. Hear God's word describing the problem. I'm reading from the Message translation **READ 3:1-6.**

"I see right through your work... you're dead, stone dead. Wake up!" The angel told the church at Sardis. Once again the penetrating eyes of God penetrated right to the heart of what was wrong. They had become satisfied with what they were doing. They thought they were safe from outside evil. They just closed the door to the outside stuff thinking none of it could seep in. But they forgot, the people themselves brought evil in because not all had that life changing transformation and not all were true Christians who never left their old lives or old teachings;

Complacency isn't good. It's resting on the things that happened yesteryear. I have yet to see a sports team who didn't get to the big dance be satisfied with where

they were. They always make trades to improve themselves, change coaches and managers, fire higher ups who come satisfied with the team. Even the winners try improving because they don't want to rest on what was, but look to can we do it again? So being satisfied isn't good. It isn't good in the church either. Churches should be like seeds planted in the ground, always growing, sometimes having weeds plucked, but with watering from the Word of God, nourishment from the Holy Spirit, keeping the roots going deep in the belief of Jesus Christ and him only then that church will continue to grow in the Grace of God.

It is sad to say that we close churches in the United Methodist denomination, not just in our Conference, but in others as well. Why do they close? Because no one attends. Sometimes smaller churches merge with another one like what happened at Sugar Creek. Yet it is true people either have given up on their faith, or even gone elsewhere where they have been fed the word of God and they attend a church they believe is an "alive" church.

I don't think there are too many people who when they are young aren't reaching for the moon. On Mondays when I read the sports page I like to see who has been picked at Athlete of the Week. I read with interest what they want to do with their lives and not one of them has ever said they were content with their lives and want to be bums. No! They all have plans of going to school, being a

professional ball player, a doctor, a teacher making a difference in this country and the world. Some will succeed. Some might fail. But hey, if you don't try, taking a risk, then they will become complacent and just settle for being ho hum. I hope they never give up the dream. I hope they keep struggling, keep growing, keep learning and reaching for the next step on the ladder. You keep the dream alive and you press on each new day. I do that with golf. After a bad round of golf I try to remember the good shots. The good holes, the pars or a birdie I might have made. I focus on what I might do the next time, to be better, just like I strive to be a better pastor and preacher for the people God has sent me. I don't rest on what has been, but focus on what can be, and what I believe God wants not only of me, but the church he has assigned me.

My buddy Barclay says "that though they had the reputation that they were alive, they were spiritually dead. Sin had crept into the church and the church began to die. They were a dead church." Barclay says, "The truth was that the church in Sardis had ceased to matter. It was so lifeless that it was not worth attacking." Could we say it became more of a social club than a witness for Jesus? Did you know years ago in Russia that they had spies in the Christian churches so that if they said one thing against the state or brought up too much about faith in God the leaders would be arrested? The true believers began an underground church and

kept on worshipping the God that had led them and watched over them. Today in some places you can talk about God. Our friend Pete Hughes can testify to that.

In other words, the Sardis church didn't make a difference in what was going on. They had no impact in their community. They lost their focus of changing lives one by one and introducing people to Jesus Christ for salvation. Your faith should matter no matter where you are. You come to worship to praise God and to find the strength to witness to your faith in everyday life. You come to find solutions to your problems, how to deal with them, how to have a life changing experience. And if you are serious, if you truly ask God to help you, then He will tell you like it is.

I just read an advertisement from the Crossroad UMC in Washington IL that just completed its second phase of a building program and the church has grown by leaps and bounds. Listen to their ad: "It's about you! Are you hurting or in pain? Do you struggle with relationships? Searching for a resolution you can keep? Is your heart heavy because of the loss of a loved one?—sickness?—tragedy? Is the world leading your children astray? Is your stomach in knots because of "what if" worries? It's about you...we would love to help. Changing lives through Jesus Christ is what we are all about." Great ad. Great focus. The Crossroads UMC doing what God has called them to do. Focusing on those who are hurting just like Jesus has told us to do.

Now we don't have to be a "copy cat" church but we certainly should be looking to do what we believe God is leading us to do right here. "Be thou my vision O Lord of my heart; naught be all else to me save that thou are. Thou my best thought by day or by night, waking and sleeping thy presence my light" should be our prayer, not just a hymn we sing.

Just because you had an encounter with God doesn't mean that you can sit back and relax thinking you got it made. That's a trick that you know who would like you to believe so that your witness to the community will be nothing more than you go to church. We should want people to know what is important is having a relationship with Christ. Has the church forgotten its mission? Have we forgotten the great commission that Jesus told his disciples? Don't we have a stain glass window telling why this church exists and what our purpose is? You know the one, "Go...yes go into all the world making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." That's our calling. Our focus is to share God's love and Jesus' redemptive powers with the whole world. After all he does have the whole world in his hands...he is creator of it all.

Listen to what God says to the church. "Wake up! Remember what you have received, and heard; OBEY IT AND REPENT!" Does everyone in Williamsville go

to church on Sunday? Does everyone on your street have a relationship with Christ?
Have you invited others to join you for worship? Are we a complacent church?
Have we lost our vision and focus? As a church? As the people of God?

All 5 churches have heard the voice of God as God's eyes have penetrated right to the heart. He has given a warning and He offers his grace. But they aren't alone. For his eyes are on this church. His eyes penetrating its members, those who attend this church. He who has ears....let him hear the voice of God.... it's time to wake up and repent and receive new life through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May it be so today for God's children for before us this morning are the symbols of transformation....the bread and the wine, his body that was broken for us...his blood that was shed for us. We have been redeemed by a great price and let's never forget that or become complacent about the love God has for us and his Church.