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Revelation 1:5-6 sings: “Listen to the One who loves us and freed us and made us to be a kingdom people.” This is a reminder that we are to be an alternative community, living into and out of the kingdom, the realm and rule of God.

Jesus roams among the churches, affirming and celebrating steadfast faithfulness, consistent resistance to empire, and out-loud loving--“Get up on your feet, there’s life in you yet!”

Jesus reminds churches that we are to be marked by kingdom living; we are to be “God’s sign language in a world gone deaf.” People should be able to look at our churches and see signs, foretastes, and glimpses of the kingdom of God.

In Revelation 2-3, Jesus confronts the complacency of the churches, unmasking and naming the ways in which we have become complicit with the systems and structures of domination—“You have a name of being alive but you are dead. . . You say: ‘I am rich. I have prospered and I need nothing.’”

This gives new meaning to the painting of Jesus knocking on the door—It is communal not individual and Jesus is locked outside the church! The church is so caught up in wealth, privilege, power, and possessions that Jesus ends up on the outside having to knock on a closed door. They have distorted the gospel into some kind of soothing sentimentality, settling in, as Walter Wink says, as “kept chaplains in an unjust order,” propping up the systems of domination and empire. No wonder Jesus wants to spit them out!

Doug Meeks [*God the Economist*], Ted Jennings [*Good News to the Poor* and *John Wesley’s Evangelical Economics*], United Methodist Women [see February issue of *Response* on Mammon], Ched Myers [*Sabbath Economics*] and many others have challenged the church to see the ways in which we have domesticated, downsized, privatized the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially concerning economics and violence. Structural economic violence is the number one form of violence in the Bible and in our world, and the church has been slow in engaging the forces behind this evil.

Peter Storey reminds us: “John Wesley evangelized not just individuals but institutions” and created alternative economic models including credit unions, micro-lending funds, worker-owned cooperatives, and clinics that offered open access to health care. Storey argues, “The church has lost our prophetic voice because it’s rich. . . . We have become a church of the comfortable, a church of the middle class and affluent.” And Storey makes it clear that the problem is not only our distance from the poor but our proximity to Caesar.

We can no longer distinguish between being Americans and being Christians. We have forgotten our calling to embody what Robert Franklin [*Crisis in the Village*] calls “prophetic stewardship”.

Bishop Ken Carder asks, “How is it that individual conversion is seen as more central to the gospel than shaping communities that are a sign, a foretaste of the kingdom of God. . . so

that evangelism becomes 'find a need and meet it' instead of 'announce God's reign and live it.' ”

What might it mean for the church to regain its prophetic voice and become God's contrast community in such a time as this? How might it redefine our understandings of worship, evangelism, stewardship, mission, salvation, sin, and reconciliation? Why are we not seen as agents of change, effectively engaging and challenging the politics of exclusion, the culture of greed, the justification of violence and empire building?

Wesley worried that we would become a church captured by the middle class. He declared that it was more important for the salvation of our souls to build relationships with, spend time among, listen to and learn from people who are impoverished than it was to participate in communion. He argued we should not build big buildings because then we would need wealthy people to pay for the buildings and then most assuredly we would shave off the sharp edges of the gospel so as not to offend those whose money we need.

The United Methodist Church has strong and prophetic language around justice issues, but it is hard to see what we say we believe. While we have some extraordinary congregations embodying life-giving partnerships among and with those on the margins, and we have congregations that are challenging powers and principalities, most of our congregations are disconnected from the impoverished and marginalized and complicit with the politics of greed. We have been all too silent in a culture that is defined by what Dr. King identified as the giant triplets of evil: economic exploitation, racism, and militarism.

Revelation offers challenge and comfort, judgment and vision. "You have lost your passion, you have abandoned the love you had at first...Remember then from what you have fallen and repent." May it be so.