

Sun., Nov. 29 (First Sunday of Advent): Do Good Feel Good Christmas: Gear Up (Joy!)

Memory Verse: Hebrews 10:24 “And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds.”

Sunday Message: Gear Up (Joy!)

Text: Acts 20:35

Sermon Scripture: Acts 10:1-8

Reading of Scripture: James 2:14-17

Blurb: This Christmas season we’re choosing to be a Scrooge! Now, that’s not what you may think. Actually, it’s a calling to step up and experience Christmas on a whole new level. This Sunday we go to Act 10 to meet a man named Cornelius. He’ll show us how we need to gear up for true Christmas by changing what we do each day. If you want true joy this Christmas, this message is for you!

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds.”
-Hebrews 10:24

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Lift Up Your Heads Ye Mighty Gates

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE: Scrooge Video 1

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH -Matt Lindholm as Scrooge; Reader: Amanda Lucas

SCRIPTURE READING: James 2:14-17 (CEB) -Reader: Amanda Lucas

James was the brother of Jesus. He tells us that having faith in our hearts for Jesus but not living it out in our daily lives is useless. True faith changes what we do! James 2:14-17, “14 My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can’t save anyone, can it? 15 Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. 16 What if one of you said, ‘Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!’? What good is it if you don’t actually give them what their body needs? 17 In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn’t result in faithful activity.”

SERVE MOMENT: UM Student Sunday -Rebekah Werner
St. Andrew’s Family Shelter - Pastor David

PRAYERS: -Pastor Andrew

MESSAGE: “This Year Be a Scrooge: Do Good Feel Good Christmas #1: Gear Up (Joy!)”

PP#1: This Year Be a Scrooge: Do Good Feel Good Christmas

Gear Up: Joy!

“In everything I have shown you that, by working hard, we must help the weak. In this way we remember the Lord Jesus’ words: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” -Acts 20:35

This Year Be a Scrooge: Do Good Feel Good Christmas. Gear Up: Joy! Acts 20:35, “In everything I have shown you that, by working hard, we must help the weak. In this way we remember the Lord Jesus’ words: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

PP#2: *Image of Scrooge barking at Christmas cheer, subtitled, “Bah! Humbug!”*

We all know Charles Dickens’ famous story *A Christmas Carol*. It’s about the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas. Scrooge was a bitter, self-centered, dried-up old grinch who took pleasure in using others to build his fortune. His response to the very idea of Christmas was, everybody say it, “*Bah! Humbug!*”

But through an inner journey into the depths of his soul, guided by the three ghosts, Ebenezer Scrooge’s cold hart was finally softened, and he was radically transformed by Christmas.

Christmas does that, you know. Real Christmas. Not just the holidays, and celebrating, and doing all the feel good stuff. But real Christmas does. Christmas that sees the Light of joy, hope, and peace and love, born as a baby in a manger stall, and coming into each of our hearts. This Christmas, when we open our hearts to this Savior, this Jesus, *this* Christmas changes everything. It changes us, from a self-centered and bitter Scrooge to joyful and generous Scrooge.

PP#3: *Image of Scrooge full of Christmas cheer and spreading joy.*

You know, it’s weird that the name Scrooge still means being miserable and miserly. This story is not about that. It’s about his change! Scrooge should now mean joyful and generous!

And it’s going to mean that for us. So, this Christmas, I want us all to be Scrooges! We are transformed by the Christ of real Christmas! We were once people stuck in sin, centered on self, miserly and miserable. But now we are different! And just like Scrooge woke up Christmas morning and dashed out to go *live* Christmas doing good, so we live that way as Scrooges, too. So, you with me? Ready to be a Scrooge this year! Let’s do it!

PP#4: The Christmas Story: Luke 2:1-18

Book 1: The Gospel of Luke: Written by Luke about the life of Jesus

Book 2: The Acts of the Apostles: Written by Luke about the life of the Apostles

We’re going to take a look at some of the Scrooges in the Bible this Christmas. They’re going to help us see the true meaning of Christmas, and how to live as a Scrooge.

Turn to Act chapter 10. You know, for Christmas we usually look at the Christmas story in Luke, chapter 2. But to see the meaning of Christmas—its affect—we have to read past that story. We read the rest of Luke, which tells us all about how this Jesus came to die on the cross for our sins and to be raised again to earn us our resurrection. But the story continues. Did you know that Luke is a

two-volume story? Book one is the Gospel of Luke. But Luke wrote a sequel. It's the Book of Acts. It's because the story, the *effects* of Christmas, continue! It continues in all the Acts of the Apostles, which, by the way, is the full name for the book of Acts. The Acts of the Apostles. In Acts, we see the continuing affects of Christmas. We see Scrooges being transformed from miserable to joyful.

PP#5: *Image of a Roman centurion*

One of those Scrooges is Cornelius. Cornelius was a Roman soldier, a centurion. That meant that he was a proven soldier who was promoted to be the leader over 100 soldiers. His commander was a general, who commanded a legion with 60 centurions. Cornelius was stationed in Caesarea Maritima, the Roman headquarters in Israel, and where the Roman governor resided. So, Cornelius was also an administrator, overseeing Roman duties in the capital. Let's look at his story, Luke 10, starting at the beginning of the chapter.

PP#6: Luke 10:1-8 (CEB)

1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

“1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.”

So, Cornelius is a Roman, a non-Jew, stationed in the Roman headquarters of Israel. He's a foreigner, perhaps from Italy, but he no longer follows the Roman religion. It says that he and his household had gone through an amazing transformation.

The Roman culture was focused seeking pleasure, getting what you want, and doing what made you feel good. Not too unlike our society today, huh? And this was the same for the religion of the Roman empire. It was doing whatever you needed to do to appease the gods, to win their favor, so they would give you what you wanted. Cornelius, then, was a product of a culture that sought after whatever felt good.

PP#7: *Image for Cornelius in the Bible story as a God-fearing person*

Yet, despite this, by the time we meet Cornelius, he's already had a Scrooge conversion! Verse 2 says that he was a god-fearing man. He turned away from his culture and religion of self-focus and although it doesn't say he actually converted to Judaism, he was certainly living for the true God, and living very differently. Cornelius was converted, from his godless culture which seeks only what feels good, to being a seeker of God, who is Good. His morals are converted: he became devout and leads his whole household to be that way, too. His time is converted. Although his is frantically busy with all the duties of his role, he makes time to put God's first. Rather than using all his time to focus on what makes him feel good, He became a man of prayer and worship. And his finances are converted! Rather than using all he has to get more for himself, he starts giving to those around him that he sees in need. So now, he looks like a Scrooge!

PP#8: Gear Up! (Joy)

1. Change from feeling good to doing good

“We must help the weak...‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” -Acts 20:35

So, the first Scrooge transformation we see here in Cornelius is 1. the change from feeling good to doing good. I think Cornelius came to realize that when you chase after feeling good, it actually progressively destroys good. A life of pursuing self-indulgence and striving for what makes us feel good, creates a monster of self-indulgence which eventually devours us. Remember St. Augustine? After 17 years of chasing feeling good in the Roman culture of hedonism, he was never satisfied. He only found true good in God. So did Cornelius. Joy—true joy—does NOT come from self-indulgence, from receiving what you want. It comes from GIVING: giving yourself to God, giving your life to living God’s way: which is a life of giving. Ten chapters later in Acts, Acts 20:35, Luke records Paul’s address to the Ephesians, “In everything I have shown you that, by working hard, we must help the weak. In this way we remember the Lord Jesus’ words: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

PP#9: *Image for how Christmas is about feeling good because of getting the stuff we want.*

What makes Christmas so wonderful? It’s the season of cheer and celebration, right? But why? Because it’s supposed to be about all the stuff that makes us feel good! Christmas is about *feeling good*. We get a vacation from work. We get to go do fun activities: parties and celebrations. We get to spend time with people we like and have fun together. We get to eat all the good foods that put a smile on our faces and feelings of contentment in our bellies. And we get to receive all the things we really want. So, Christmas is special because it’s a feel-good time of year. Right?

But then comes January and it’s back to the same old grind. The *feel good* doesn’t last.

True Christmas is not something you celebrate, *but it is something you join*. You become a part of what God started by sending His Son to Bethlehem. It’s not an event or a feel-good “fix” moment you celebrate. Scrooge *joined* the Christmas movement. Cornelius *joined* God’s movement. For you and I, Christmas is an invitation to *join* a different way of living. Christmas is an awakening!

This year, we may not get to enjoy many of the feel good celebrations of the holidays. We may be eating by ourselves, stuck at home. We may not be able to have the parties and presents we would like. But that doesn’t really change Christmas. Christmas is not about feeling good in the moment. It’s about awakening, about joining in doing the good that God offers us.

PP#10: Gear Up! (Joy)

1. Change from feeling good to doing good
2. Practicing the Christmas habits

“He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.” -Acts 10:2

We see this Scrooge-awakening in Cornelius. He just didn’t change his allegiance from his old gods and old culture to a new one. He was awakened, and he joined in a new pattern of life. As a soldier, he knew how to gear up for battle. And as a God-fearer, he knew he needed to gear up for the daily struggles of a godly life. Look again what it says. He adopted a continual pattern of healthy, holy habits for daily life. He prayed regularly. He worshiped. He gave regularly and generously. He adopted a new lifestyle. Scrooge and Cornelius now saw—their sight was changed, they *saw*—those people who before had just blended into the background of their selfish lives: they now noticed those in need, and they moved quickly and generously to do something about it.

This is a key shift for us as we live as Scrooge Christians: we need to 2. practice the Christmas habits. During this languishing time of separation, as the spike of COVID makes us again

do less and stay away more, and as the darkness of daylight and frustration and anxiety all sap our energy and motivation, our temptation is to disengage from those healthy, holy habits that keep us vital. We start skipping our daily devotions. We start cutting corners on our prayers. We forget to watch the videos from church. We disengage from our grow groups. We don't do the extra effort to send in our monies to church. We don't seek out the ways we can give to the Salvation Army, when it's not right in front of us any more. We don't make those calls or send messages as often as we know we should to those who need encouragement or who are struggling. And the less we do the harder it is to keep doing. It gets harder and harder to stay engaged, and we start to drift, and fade, and dry up.

We need Christmas! We need the re-awakening within our souls, and in our daily disciplines.

Christmas is coming. What do you need to do to re-engage? Will you commit to watching the Devotional Videos we sent out as a church? Will you make a donation to hurricane relief? Will you catch up on your giving to church?

Kids, we have Ms. Sue videos for you to watch each week.

Or here's a challenge: each of us, this week, send a letter—an email or physical letter—to encourage someone. Kids: each week make a card, telling your neighbor to have a Merry Christmas, and then on Christmas Eve, run it over to their houses and leave it in their doors or mailboxes.

PP#11: *Image of the Advent Stable project we are sending out to everyone.*

Starting tomorrow we have a Christmas Countdown project for Advent for everyone. We've mailed out Bible verses to read each day. You light your Advent wreath candle at home, then take your readings and cut off the strip of paper with the day's reading. You read it, and pray it, and then fasten it to a box you've cut open. We keep doing that each day counting down the days until Christmas. Then, on Christmas, the project we've created becomes the stable for our at-home Christmas nativities that declares the true meaning of Christmas. A simple project, maybe. But it will help you re-engage the practice of gearing up so that Christmas can awaken in you.

PP#12: Luke 10:1-8 (CEB)

3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

You know, Cornelius' pattern of healthy, holy habits made him ready and able to receive a calling that God had for him. Had he been drifting slowly away, he would have missed it. But his habits made him ready. Let's pick it up in verse 3.

"3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, 'Cornelius!' 4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. 'What is it, Lord?' he asked."

God sent an angel to Cornelius. Now, God was doing a bigger plan, a plan to convert Peter so he could see that Jesus was for Gentiles, too. And so, God starts with an unsuspecting Roman centurion, who had a life pattern of seeking God and praying. Cornelius was shocked, right? But then God's message came through.

PP#13: Luke 10:1-8 (CEB)

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. 8 He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Still in the middle of verse 4, "The angel answered, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.'"

Wow! Hear that? Your healthy, holy practices lift you right into God's presence! God sees! God notices! And God can use you for something in His plan. Stay geared up, church! God is looking for soldiers!

Verse 5, "'Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.' 7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. 8 He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa."

Cornelius, who was used to obeying orders and who made it a habit to follow through, got God's plan rolling. And the rest of the story unfolds, where God shows Peter and the other Jewish disciples, that God intends the Gospel of Jesus for everyone. God is opening up the Kingdom in a radical way!

This was Christmas! God coming to Bethlehem as a baby to open up His Kingdom to everyone! What a radical move!

PP#14: Gear Up! (Joy)

1. Change from feeling good to doing good
2. Practicing the Christmas habits
3. Be ready to shift to a higher gear

"We are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives." -Ephesians 2:10

So, the baby born in Bethlehem reawakens us to not just celebrate Christmas, but to join Christmas. That means 1. changing gears from seeking to feel good, to doing good. It means to 2. gear up on healthy, holy habits that keep our faith fresh and vital. And thirdly, in this story of Cornelius, we see God is calling Cornelius to 3. shift up to a higher gear. The story, you see, doesn't end here. God is widening Peter's understanding of the Gospel. But at the same time, God's bigger plan also has more for Cornelius. He is worshiping the true God. But God is not content to leave him there. God wants him to come to know Jesus, too. And that's what happens! Cornelius hears about Jesus from Peter. Peter sees—literally, in a vision—that Jesus is for others, and then Cornelius becomes the first Gentile that Peter baptized. The Holy Spirit came upon them all—Cornelius and all in his household—and they became part of the family of Jesus.

God does not intend for you to plateau where you are at with Him. He has more in store. So, when you gear up for God, you also need to be ready to shift to a higher gear as well! We are given the Holy Spirit, and we now have capacity for more!

PP#15: *Image of a hot Corvette with tire burns on the road*

My brother went on vacation a couple of years ago. Now, I really like Corvettes. And my brother rented a Corvette as part of his vacation. He told me just to make me jealous! Well, he told me how he was driving all around the city, showing off and revving the engine. But he never got out of 4th gear. And as he heard the gears whine, he knew the engine could do so much more. So, he took the car out of town and found a nice straight road. And he was finally able to open it up a bit, shift into a higher gear. He went from zero to 80 in like five seconds. It was amazing! Now, although he topped out briefly at 90, he knew he could have gone much faster. The car was capable of so much more. How tragic it is to have that amazing machine putting around town at 30 miles per hour!

That's us. When we are given the Holy Spirit, we are capable of so much more. We must not put around with unused potential. We need to 1. change our goal from feeling good to doing good. We need to 2. gear up with healthy holy habits to increase our capacity, and then we need to 3. shift into higher gears when God calls us to more. Then, and only then, will our true joy be complete!

This Christmas, let's be Scrooge. Let's make Christmas not something we merely celebrate, but something we join. Let's embrace the transformation, and let's shift into a higher gear!

Amen.

CLOSING SONG: *More Blessed to Give thanb Receive* -Sanctify

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-Student Day Offerings

-Give of your monies to God's work through this church. You can give in person, in the offering box as you leave the sanctuary. You can mail it or drop it off in the church office. Or, most conveniently, you can make an automated transfer or a debit card payment using the square on the bulletin or by going to the church website.

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Today we learned to gear up. Next week, as we head to Christmas, we'll learn to dig down.
St. Andrew's Family Shelter food sign-up
Remember to do your letter to encourage someone.
Start your Advent Christmas Count Down today! Watch the video tomorrow.

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds."
-Hebrews 10:24

BENEDICTION -Pastor David

CLOSING MUSIC -Sanctify