

Sun., Dec. 13 (Third Sunday of Advent):

Memory Verse: “We are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is making His appeal with you through us. We beg you as Christ’s representatives, ‘Be reconciled to God!’” -2 Corinthians 5:20

Message: **This Year Be a Scrooge: Do Good Feel Good Christmas: Reach Out (Faith!)**

Text: “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace on all the people He favors” -Luke 2:14

Sermon Scripture: Acts 10:34-38

Reading of Scripture: Acts 10:23-33

Blurb: Christmas is not about feeling the Christmas spirit. It’s about joining God’s Christmas movement—following His example—offering Jesus to others. Like Scrooge, we need Christmas alterations of our minds, hearts and actions so we live every day extending the joy of knowing Jesus.

WELCOME -Pastor David

Be prepared to light your home Advent wreaths

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“We are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is making His appeal with you through us. We beg you as Christ’s representatives, ‘Be reconciled to God!’” -2 Corinthians 5:20

We join with Cornelius when Peter came to teach them about Jesus: **“I sent for you right away, and you were kind enough to come. Now, here we are, gathered in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has directed you to say.”** (Acts 10:33)

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

It Is More Blessed to Give than Receive

Is He Worthy?

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE: Scrooge Video 3

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH -Matt Lindholm as Scrooge; Reader: Michael Berglund

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 10:23-33 (CEB) -Reader: Michael Berglund

In the story of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10, Peter also has a vision. His vision to eat unclean food showed him to accept unclean people, especially non-Jews, like Cornelius. Acts 10:23-33.

23 Peter invited them into the house as his guests.

The next day he got up and went with them, together with some of the believers from Joppa. 24 They arrived in Caesarea the following day. Anticipating their arrival, Cornelius had gathered his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in order to honor him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Get up! Like you, I’m just a human.” 27 As they continued to talk, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28 He said to them, “You all realize that

it is forbidden for a Jew to associate or visit with outsiders. However, God has shown me that I should never call a person impure or unclean. 29 For this reason, when you sent for me, I came without objection. I want to know, then, why you sent for me.”

30 Cornelius answered, “Four days ago at this same time, three o’clock in the afternoon, I was praying at home. Suddenly a man in radiant clothing stood before me. 31 He said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayers, and your compassionate acts are like a memorial offering to him. 32 Therefore, send someone to Joppa and summon Simon, who is known as Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, located near the seacoast.’ 33 I sent for you right away, and you were kind enough to come. Now, here we are, gathered in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has directed you to say.”

PRAYERS & LORD’S PRAYER - Pastor Andrew

MESSAGE: “This Year Be a Scrooge: Do Good Feel Good Christmas #3: Reach Out (Faith!)”

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

Reach Out: Faith!

“Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace on all the people He favors” -Luke 2:14

This year, we are committing to be a Scrooge: but not like we think of Ebenezer Scrooge *before* Christmas, but the transformed Scrooge we see *after* Christmas, a Scrooge full of joy, hope, faith, love, and peace. Charles Dickens ends his story saying that “Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; ... and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One!”

Scrooge’s “alteration” was from living a selfish life concerned only with feeling good because of his money and power, to actually doing good, keeping Christmas each day thereafter, being a good friend, master, and good man: doing good each day.

Christmas, you see, is not something we celebrate, but something we join: by being Scrooges. We 1. gear up in joy, committing to living for Jesus and gearing up for more. We 2. dig down into our hearts, letting Jesus bring “alteration” there that wells up into our public, personal and secret lives. And today we hear how 3. Scrooges reach out in faith, inviting others to receive Jesus, too.

For our Christmas story, we’re actually in Acts. Jesus’ birth is told at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke. But since Christmas is about joining God’s movement, we see the results of Christmas in the sequel to the Gospel of Luke, which is the Acts of the Apostles. The impact of Christmas is seen in the story of Cornelius. He is a Scrooge, who has a heart change, and life change. He is in the regular healthy, holy habits of prayer, worship, and giving generously.

But there is a problem here with Scrooge Cornelius. Although he is a God-worshiper, he was not a part of God’s Chosen People.

Now, what’s the purpose of Christmas? Why did God send Jesus to be born in Bethlehem? We hear it in the proclamation of the angels that night to the shepherds, “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace on *all the people* He favors” (Luke 2:14). God favors all the people of earth, not

just the Jews. All people. That's the Christmas movement! God came in Jesus at Christmas to restore lost people back into relationship with Him. In our Count Down to Christmas stables we are creating each day as a church together, we have heard that through the promised Messiah, all the nations will be blessed. And that's why the magi are part of the Christmas story. They are non-Jew foreigners, who are brought into the Christmas movement.

So, for the Christmas movement to expand as intended, God has to do another "alteration" of another Scrooge. We go back to the Cornelius story in Luke 10. But we see the story shift from Scrooge Cornelius to Scrooge Peter.

At the beginning of 10, God sends an angel to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, to have him send for Simon Peter, who happened to be nearby in Joppa. Then God gives Peter a vision of unclean food and commands Peter to eat. At first Peter refuses, citing the Jewish food laws. But then he realizes that God is telling him to welcome forbidden outsiders. And so he welcomes Cornelius' men, and then goes back to Caesarea with them.

PP#2: Acts 10:24-33 (CEB)

24 They arrived in Caesarea the following day. Anticipating their arrival, Cornelius had gathered his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in order to honor him. ... 33 "I sent for you right away, and you were kind enough to come. Now, here we are, gathered in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has directed you to say."

Now, it says in verse 24 that Cornelius, "anticipating their arrival, gathered his relatives and close friends." Then, in verse 33, Cornelius says to Peter, "You were kind enough to come. Now, here we are, gathered in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has directed you to say."

This is how we are to approach worship! We cannot gather together in our church building, but when we can, this is how we are to gather: we come ready, anticipating, gathered together as a household. Don't leave people at home! Gather everyone together to hear God's words of life!

And this Christmas, as we gather remotely, we still come to worship this way! Stop what other things you are doing. Focus on the worship. Gather your family and household. You are coming into the presence of God, so listen *intently* to everything the Lord has for you to hear! Cornelius knows that God is up to something. He is expecting. Are you? Are you anticipating?

PP#3: Acts 10:34-48 (CEB)

34 Peter said, "I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another. 35 Rather, in every nation, whoever worships Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him. 36 This is the message of peace He sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all!"

Acts records what Peter said to Cornelius and those gathered there with him. Peter is having a Scrooge "alteration." Acts 10:34, "34 Peter said, "I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another. 35 Rather, in every nation, whoever worships Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him. 36 This is the message of peace He sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all!"

Here's the message of the Christmas movement: God doesn't show partiality! God sent the message of peace on earth to the Israelites in the Good News of Jesus. He is Lord of all! Every nation, every people: whoever worships and does what is right to God.

PP#4: Reach Out: Faith

1. Alteration of your mind

And here is Peter's first Scrooge alteration—for Peter and for us! It's a God-alteration of our minds. Peter was stuck on seeing Jesus only for him and those like him. Jesus came as the Jewish Messiah, and so they thought He must have come only for the Jews. But God needs His people to get a bigger vision, an expanded mission, a global initiative! Peter is thinking too small. You and I, we think too small!

That's our danger, especially this year. We're thinking a lot about what we're missing out on this Christmas. Plans changed, expectations ruined. We're isolating and developing a very closed mind set about Christmas. We are in danger of missing God's Christmas movement!

We need an alteration of our minds, to conceptualize Christmas as not about us—or what we're getting (or not getting) to do. It's about peace on earth: for us, yes, but also for others. How are we offering Christmas to others? God doesn't show partiality!

Our memory verse this week is 2 Corinthians 5:20, "We are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is making His appeal to you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, 'Be reconciled to God!'" God is making His appeal through you to others. How can you convey the earnest message, "Be reconciled to God!"?

PP#5: Acts 10:34-48 (CEB)

"37 You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism John preached. 38 You know about Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and endowed with power. Jesus traveled around doing good and healing everyone oppressed by the devil because God was with Him. 39 We are witnesses of everything He did, both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree, 40 but God raised Him up on the third day and allowed Him to be seen, 41 not by everyone but by us. ..."

We go back to Acts 10, verse 37. Peter continues sharing with them. "You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism John preached. [Remember, Cornelius was a commander in the capital...he was familiar with current events, and certainly all about Jesus.] You know about Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and endowed with power. Jesus traveled around *doing good* and healing everyone oppressed by the devil because God was with Him. [Doing good, just like Cornelius knows God wants.] We are witnesses of everything He did, both in Judea and in Jerusalem. [Remember, they are witnesses, not researchers. They testify from a first-person account who have experienced Jesus.] They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him up on the third day and allowed Him to be seen, not by everyone but by us." Cornelius hasn't seen the resurrected Jesus, but as eye-witnesses, Peter and his crew proclaim it true.

PP#6: Reach Out: Faith

1. Alteration of your mind
2. Alteration of your heart

Peter, being a witness of Jesus who has his mind changed about Jesus' purpose, also experiences an alteration of his heart. He now cares about what God is doing. He's earnestly and eagerly going out and telling these non-Jews about Jesus! He's been Scrooged! He's like Ebenezer

Scrooge going to Bob Cratchett and raising his salary! “Here, I want you to have this blessing! Not only am I giving it, I *want* you to have it.” That’s a change of heart!

Fellow Scrooges, do we have hearts for the lost? God’s heart breaks for those who do not trust in Jesus. Ours should, too, if we follow Jesus. And it’s our broken hearts, guided by our altered minds, that compel us to celebrate Christmas differently: not focusing on what we can do to feel good this Christmas, but to actually *do good* as witnesses. What is the greatest good we can do? It’s to invite others to Jesus.

Sometimes we think we are doing good enough. Our hearts settle for doing *some* good. I’ve shared with a couple of people about Jesus. I’ve done my part.

You know, I’ve got two kids. What if one knows Jesus, and the other one doesn’t. Is that good enough? I mean, half isn’t bad, right? Have I done my part?

No! I would be driven 100% for *both* my kids to know Jesus. God feels the same way! *Some* of His kids isn’t enough. His heart breaks for every last one. And He wants yours to break so you keep going 100% for all of them! Doing some good is not good enough for our frantic God!

And so, God is opening Cornelius moments for us: putting people in our hearing who, like Cornelius, are asking for more, who want to know more of God, who need to hear about how Jesus is our hope and peace. God is creating opportunities for us—yes, even this Christmas!...*especially* this Christmas!—for us to offer Jesus to others. Does your heart break for them? If your heart is too focused on what you’re missing this Christmas, then you will miss opportunities God is creating for you to join His Christmas movement. How can you position yourself so you are ready to share?

PP#7: Acts 10:34-48 (CEB)

“41 ...We are witnesses whom God chose beforehand, who ate and drank with Him after God raised Him from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

We keep listening to Scrooge Peter, verse 41. “We are witnesses whom God chose beforehand, who ate and drank with Him after God raised Him from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

PP#8: Reach Out: Faith

1. Alteration of your mind
2. Alteration of your heart
3. Alteration of your actions

Like Scrooge Peter, we have been entrusted with a wonderful experience of Jesus first-hand. We have Him in our hearts! The Holy Spirit chairs the boardroom of our souls. We walk and talk and eat with Jesus every day! And we have been chosen by God to be His witnesses. Everyone, everyone who believes in Him will be forgiven. Don’t hold this back, church!

We spend so much of our time and attention—particularly at Christmas—on ourselves and those closest to us. Isn’t that true? Think about what you’re going to miss this Christmas. Isn’t it all about our inner circle? God is asking us to behave differently, to be led out of our comfort zones.

Peter left the nice home of his dear friend in Joppa and went to Caesarea with strangers. How is God calling us out of what we like, what is comfortable, what is safe?

How can you make Christmas about sharing Jesus with others? Perhaps not doing all your typical Christmas celebrations has actually created some capacity for you to do something different: something not focused on you. What can you imagine you can do to share the joy, hope, faith, love and peace of Christmas with others? They, you know, are struggling far more than you! They don't have Jesus to help them through this season. How can you celebrate Christmas by offering Jesus to others?

Perhaps you could drop by a plate of goodies with an invitation to watch our Christmas Eve video. Perhaps you could share our special Christmas Day pageant video on social media. Perhaps you could invite their kids to our Christmas Camp activity. Perhaps you could add a daily prayer for a friend or neighbor who doesn't know Jesus when you light your Advent wreath at home and do your Count Down to Christmas stable. Perhaps you could make a point to make some calls to people in your family you know who do not know Jesus, and tell them how Christmas is still special this year for you because it is about Jesus' birth. Or perhaps you could do some Secret Santa random acts of kindness or gifts, with a note that tells them that God loves them. I hope your mind is racing, and your heart is pumping, with creative ways to join the Christmas movement this year!

As Scrooge Christians, we are always a part of God's Christmas mission. Like Peter, God sends us, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, as His witnesses. Missionaries are not those people who go off someplace special to share Jesus. They share Jesus wherever they are, but then intentionally place themselves where they can be useful for God. We are missionaries! We are always ready to share about Jesus, but we strategically place ourselves where we can be useful for God.

The greatest good we can do—which, by the way, will also create the greatest feeling of good, ever!—is to have some part in leading others to Jesus. May this be your Christmas wish this year!

Amen.

CLOSING SONG: *Angels from the Realm of Glory* -Sanctify

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-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

Next week, as we head to Christmas, we'll Get Real (Love!)

Continue your Advent Christmas Count Down today! Watch the video tomorrow.

Thursday: Drive through caroling to pick up Christmas worship packets.

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"We are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is making His appeal with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, 'Be reconciled to God!'" -2 Corinthians 5:20

BENEDICTION -Pastor David