

**Sun., Dec. 20 (Fourth Sunday of Advent):**

Memory Verse: “The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.’” -Luke 2:10

Message: **This Year Be a Scrooge: Do Good Feel Good Christmas: Get Real (Love!)**

Text: “So [the son] got up and went to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.” -Luke 15:20

Sermon Scripture: Luke 15:25-32

Reading of Scripture: Luke 15:11-24

Blurb: As we come up to Christmas, we see that God is a Christmas Scrooge who invites us to a do good feel good Christmas. We hear the story of the Prodigal Son to help us see God differently, come home to Him, and forgive others. This message will set you up to celebrate Christmas well!

**WELCOME** -Pastor David

Be prepared to light your home Advent wreaths

**MEMORY VERSE** -Pastor David

“The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.’” -Luke 2:10

**WORSHIP MUSIC SET** -Sanctify

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*  
*Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*  
Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

**GENERATIONAL BRIDGE:** Scrooge Video 4

**LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH** -Matt Lindholm as Scrooge

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Luke 15:11-24 (CEB)

**Jesus tells the story of The Prodigal Son. It’s a story of salvation: of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of love. Luke 15:11-24.**

**“11 Jesus said, ‘A certain man had two sons. 12 The younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the inheritance.’ Then the father divided his estate between them. 13 Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.**

**“14 When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. 15 He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. 17 When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have more than enough food, but I’m starving to death! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands.’ ’ 20 So he got up and went to his father.**

**“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. 21 Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! 23 Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting 24 because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.”**

**PRAYERS:** “A Christmas Prayer” by Robert Louis Stevenson -Pastor David

Robert Louis Stevenson, contemporary of Charles Dickens, also a British author (Scottish) “Loving Father, Help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men. Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.”

**SERVE MOMENT:** Christmas Offering: Feed My Starving Children, Goal: \$725

**MESSAGE:** “This Year Be a Scrooge: Do Good Feel Good Christmas #4: Get Real (Love!)”

**PP#1:** This Year Be a Scrooge: Do Good Feel Good Christmas  
Get Real (Love!)

“So he got up and went to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.” -Luke 15:20

This year we’re learning to be a Scrooge, Christmas Scrooges! That means doing good and feeling good because of what Christmas is really about. We’ve been looking at some Scrooges in the Bible as examples of this, and we’ve seen how both Cornelius and Peter were Christmas Scrooges. They taught us that to be Scrooges we needed to gear up with joy with Christmas practices and shift into a higher gear. They taught us to dig down with hope, and have Jesus transform us from the inside out. They taught us to reach out in faith through an alteration of mind, attitude and actions.

Now we’re coming up on Christmas. So we Get Real: Love! Luke 15:20, “So [the son] got up and went to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.”

As Christmas approaches, we realize that God has been the original Christmas Scrooge all along! This is why we celebrate Christmas.

You see, when God was first creating all things, God fore-knew that if He made humans with free will, that we would rebel, turn against Him and that we would be lost to sin. So, before God shaped Adam and Eve, God knew that the people He was making would need saving. God had a choice: would He make people anyway, knowing the ugly cost of salvation they would require? But God also pre-loved the people He wanted to make: loved us and chose us. This was God’s Scrooge moment: the choice He made to love with a total self-sacrificing cost. So God, with a tear of joy and a tear of sorrow, shaped the clay into the form of a human.

This is what caused Christmas. So often I've heard that our human sin is what required Christmas: God came to save us from the sin we got ourselves into. And although that is true on one level, the deeper level is that it is God's pre-love that prompted Christmas. You see, God was not surprised or caught off guard by human sin. God is not reacting. God pre-knows. God pre-loves, and He pre-chooses. So, God's incredible pre-love for His would-be fallen people is what set Christmas into motion, even before time began. Christmas time began before time itself!

**PP#2: Christmas: Get Real (Love!)**

1. Reach Down

Christmas shows us a Scrooge-like God most clearly. God's love compels Him to *reach down*, to show up in Jesus, to offer us stranded people a hand, and pull us back to Him in a restored relationship.

When this Jesus grew up and went around preaching and sharing the Good News of God's love, He taught one story that really is the Christmas Story. We call it the Story of the Prodigal Son.

Now the Prodigal Son story was a common motif in ancient Middle-Eastern culture. It was built on the dynamics of family inheritance traditions, respect for your elders, and the responsibility to the family. As Jesus told the story, the listeners would have quickly understood the plot direction, much like an underdog sports story might be for us, or an ugly duckling plot. But in Jesus' version, there is a twist, a surprise ending.

In His story there are 2½ Scrooges: two for sure, and a possible third. The first Scrooge is the father, who represents our Heavenly Father. His love for his sons compels him to pre-love them, always choose them no matter what, and sets the Christmas Scrooge-like way he treats them.

The younger son is the one who goes through the Scrooge transformation. The story starts in the bonds of relationship, the fidelity of sons to their fathers. But then, in a plot development, the younger son rebels. He doesn't want to live under the authority of the father or the responsibility to the family. In this sense, it becomes an "every man" story. We all have wanted to rebel against our authority and responsibility. Many of us have also had to deal with children who rebel against us.

Notice the immaturity described here. Rather than just walk away, the son demands his inheritance. This suggests the son knows the generous character of his father. The father didn't have to do this. In fact, it was extremely rude to ask for it. In a sense, it was like the son is saying that he wished his father would just up and die already. Can you catch a glimpse here of God's broken heart at human sin and rebellion? But the son knew the father's nature to give him good things, and in the story, takes advantage of it, even while insulting his father. This was a huge violation in that culture, and also doesn't sit well in ours, either! And the immaturity and the impudence here is that the son wants the resources that he didn't earn or that weren't his. He wants to take the wealth his father earned and spend it on himself. He wants his *father's wealth*, but not his father, or any responsibility.

The normal, expected plot would be for the father to banish his son without a penny! But in Jesus' story, the father showers him with blessings as he sins. Again, this is a window into our God, who blesses us even while we live in sin, long before we ever turn to Him.

**PP#3: *Image of the Prodigal Son stopping pigs but resolving to go home.***

The son wants it all *his* way, but funded by *others*. And that's exactly what he goes off and does. And, true to real life, the life of sin is fun for a while. But it doesn't sustain itself; it can't keep going. And eventually his ill-gotten resources run out.

This “come to God moment” is exactly what Jesus’ listeners expect. My Bible translates it, “he came to his senses” (Luke 15:17). He hits bottom. The folly of his immaturity and presumption and selfishness brings a hard and honest self-realization. In the story, this is his Scrooge moment. He finally stops making excuses or blaming others, and takes personal responsibility. He grows up, and heads back home—but not to get anything, but to admit his failure. At best he hopes for an honest chance at a decent job.

Now, this is where the typical plot line would be that he goes home, confesses his sin, and tries to begin anew. The shamed father, maybe out of generosity, perhaps would extend to him a *limited* restoration. But the son would be held at arm’s length. His father might acknowledge him as his son, but the son would have to *earn* his own way now, and if truly repentant, try to pay restitution to the family. The son would need to earn his right to be included back in the family.

We do this, don’t we? Isn’t this how we normally treat people, even those we love? They violate us, wound us, betray us, use us, and we are so shamed and wounded. When we encounter them again, even if they apologize, we keep them at arm’s length. We make them pay for what they’ve done—they must make amends—or at least we don’t let them get as close again. The relationship is different. It’s on them to reconcile back with us. They have to earn it.

We do this, don’t we? Think about normal Christmas. Who are those folks that you greet at the party, smile and shake hands, but then avoid like the plague. Like one Christmas song goes, “On Christmas I hug and kiss my wife’s mother. The rest of the year we don’t speak to each other!”

This is also the traditional view of God. God is offended at us, at our sin, at our rebellion. And so, we must be careful in approaching God. We have to appease the gods, bring offerings, do religious tasks. All the other religious systems and faiths of the world are all about what we have to do to earn our way back to God. With them, god holds us at arm’s length until we become worthy.

#### **PP#4: Christmas: Get Real (Love!)**

1. Reach Down
2. Reach Out

But this is where Jesus’ version of the story takes a twist. Jesus’ story is based not on the character of offended people, but on the radical character of a pre-loving God. Jesus says that the father was scanning the horizon for his son, day after day. He was hoping, wanting, yearning for his son. He was reaching out with his eyes every day. And when he finally saw his son, the father dropped everything in his hands and reached out to his son, running to him.

Here’s the Christmas story! God reaches out to us while we are still sinners. After we have violated God—while God is offended—while we deserve to make compensation for our sins but are in truth empty-handed, God reaches down and reaches out to us. Merry Christmas!

#### **PP#5: Christmas: Get Real (Love!)**

1. Reach Down
2. Reach Out
3. Reach Around

The son is speechless as his father suddenly falls upon him. And before the son can even say one word of apology, the father wraps his arms around him. Jesus tells this in Luke 15:20, “So [the son] got up and went to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.”

Not held at arm's length! The father takes the arms he had been reaching out to his son with and heartily wraps them around him, and pulls him in tight. The son sputters out his repentance, but his father doesn't seem to listen. He is too busy commanding his servants to bring robes and rings and shoes and to make a feast. He is fully forgiven and included without any required performances. His identity is restored. He was scrooged!

Christmas: God reaching out to us, coming to us, taking care of our offenses, and offering us the ring of identity as His child and the robe of authority and position. When we come to Him dirty, shameful and empty handed, He throws His arms around us and pulls us in tight. *We* are scrooged!

**PP#6: Two-and-a-half Questions for Christmas:**

1. Will you see God as this father?
2. Will you come to your senses and come to God?
3. Will you wrap your arms around your brother?

So, this Christmas story that Jesus told presents us with 2½ questions. One: can we switch our view of God to look like the father of this story? Reaching down, reaching out, reaching around? This is what the Baby in the manger reveals to us. This is Christmas.

Two: can we come to our senses, be honest with ourselves, and head home for Christmas? Each time we hear the various Christmas songs sing about being "home for Christmas," can you hear it as an invitation for you to go *to back to God* for Christmas, to be fully forgiven and restored. That does mean leaving your pig sty. It means leaving your selfish life behind. It means choosing a different future. But it means being who you were meant to be.

The half question comes from the third potential Scrooge in this story. As the celebration begins, the older brother comes in and is angry at how his brother is being treated. He has the traditional view of keeping his brother at arm's length. The father, however, asks him to follow his example wrap his arms around his brother.

**PP#7-8: Luke 15:25-32 (CEB)**

“25 Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. 27 The servant replied, ‘Your brother has arrived, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he received his son back safe and sound.’ 28 Then the older son was furious and didn’t want to enter in, but his father came out and begged him. 29 He answered his father, ‘Look, I’ve served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you’ve never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’ 31 Then his father said, ‘Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.’”

Let's read the ending of the story. Luke 15:25, “Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. The servant replied, ‘Your brother has arrived, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he received his son back safe and sound.’ Then the older son was furious and didn’t want to enter in, but his father came out and begged him. He answered his father, ‘Look, I’ve served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you’ve never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when

this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.' Then his father said, 'Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.'"

This is where the story ends. Jesus never says what the older brother did. Did he go through a Scrooge transformation? We're not told, I think, because this is where we are to also see ourselves. What would you do? And so, that is our half question this Christmas, too: half because it is still open ended. How will you, O Christmas Scrooge, treat those in your life who have offended you, who have betrayed you, used you, hurt you? Will you treat them civilly at Christmas, but then the rest of the year keep them at arm's length?

**PP#9: Two-and-a-half Questions for Christmas:**

1. Will you see God as this father?
2. Will you come to your senses and come to God?
3. Will you wrap your arms around your brother?

How will you do good feel good this Christmas? You can pre-choose to pre-love them, you know, just like God did for you, and does for them! You can determine to live as a Christmas Scrooge, especially to those you need to wrap your arms around. This is a Christmas present you might just need to *give* this year. Give the gift of treating them as God has treated you!

See God like the father in the story. Come to your senses and come to God, who has come to you in Christmas. Feel His loving arms around you and pulling you in tight. And then, offer that same forgiveness and welcome to those who have offended you.

This is what it looks like to celebrate a do good feel good Christmas!  
Amen.

**CLOSING SONG:** *More Blessed to Give than Receive* -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

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

Video on Wednesday, starting Wednesdays, from now on.

Christmas Eve Candlelight worship video - Candles from Christmas Bag

Christmas Day Christmas Pageant video - Candy canes from Christmas Bag

Next week, we'll be in Christmas. Service will special carol service, with Holy Communion from Christmas Bag

Then Family Broom Ball event on Wed., Dec. 30.

**MEMORY VERSE** -Pastor David

"The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.'" -Luke 2:10

**BENEDICTION** -Pastor David