

If there ever was such a thing as a New Year's Eve Grinch, it'd be me. When we start a new year is an arbitrary decision, it could just as easily be March 12th as January 1st. I'm not going to stay up until midnight tonight because I'm still going to need to get up before the sunrise, and I'm probably going to grump when they set off fireworks from grandad's bluff which is only a mile away from my house. Am I going to stay up for New Year's Eve? No. If you want to, you're welcome to do so, and more power to you.

But as we gather here tonight, we hear from our Lord **“Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.”** It would seem that staying awake is something the Lord calls us to do. Maybe I should rethink my decision to go to bed at nine tonight?

Of course, staying awake physically is not what the Lord is commanding us to do. He is calling us to live a life of spiritual awareness and preparedness, because Jesus is coming soon! Our theme for tonight: **YOU STAY AWAKE BECAUSE JESUS IS KNOCKING ON THE DOOR TO SERVE.**

First, I. We live in a land of spiritual stupor. New Year's Eve and the surrounding time off of the holidays does afford a period of self-reflection and planning that our otherwise busy lives don't permit. Many people make New Year's resolutions. Forbes.com reported that 48% of those who make resolutions want to improve fitness, 38% improve finances, 36% improve mental health, 34% want to lose weight, 32% want to improve diet.

When I interact with UWL students, I often cite their motto: Mens Corpusquae which is Latin for mind and body. Altogether, it's not a bad motto, but it reflects the spirit of our times. We care about the mind and body, but we forget about the soul. We live in a land of spiritual stupor. Of the top 14 new years resolutions on Forbes.com the only spiritual resolution was 5% resolved to meditate regularly. Nowhere on that list was reading the Bible, praying, or attending worship more often.

We live in a nation that is spiritually asleep. The biggest rising religious demographic is the nones. Nones aren't militant atheists, they just don't care. They're nothing in particular. You might as well call them the “meh”s. Or maybe you call them that unintelligible grunt I'm going to make as I wrap the pillow over my head and turn over in bed when the fireworks start going off. I want to get back to sleep. I don't care. Make this racket go away.

Yet this apathy even steeps into our churches. There are some who label themselves as Christians who want the least amount of churchgoing, Bible reading, and Jesus to get them into heaven. What's that line? I want just a hair over so my

eternity can be secure, but I don't have to make too many sacrifices. I want to get back to sleep. I don't care. Make this racket go away.

It reminds me of a church that Jesus addresses in the book of Revelation, “**‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.’**” Out of love, Jesus reproves a congregation that thinks they are rich, clothed, and prosperous. He disciplines them and tells them where true riches lie, what it truly means to be clothed, and what is true seeing. He invites them to snap out of their spiritual stupor and see what true sight is.

The next verse that follows is perhaps one of the more famous ones of the Bible, “**Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.**” This is a verse not primarily directed at unbelievers to invite Jesus into their hearts, but to those already in the church who take their faith for granted, and remain in a state of spiritual stupor. II. Jesus' knocking wakes you up.

In both Revelation 3 and our Gospel text today, we see the Master coming to knock on the door. “**If [the master] comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!**” The master wants us to be awake for when He comes again in glory, there aren't going to be second chances.

As we gather here tonight to consider 2024, I want us to reflect back on 2023. What kinds of wake up calls has the Lord brought you? Perhaps it was a financial, medical, or mental health scare. Perhaps it was the loss of a loved one or a hardship you endured. Jesus said, “**Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.**” Out of love, God lets hardships and disasters fall upon us to make us realize who is in control. He makes us suffer through little hells, so that we may not be consigned to the big, eternal hell.

God's word of law ultimately is the rapping on the door that knocks some sense into our minds, but beyond a general law that is preached through death, misfortune, and illness, we do also need to hear the specific law which further diagnoses the problem. The specific word of law is preached through God's Word, through a sermon, or through the kind counsel of a Christian friend or relative.

Our goal for 2024 is not that we aren't going to make mistakes and sin, but that we stay spiritually awake to recognize when Jesus is knocking to wake us up and call us to repentance.

Finally, III. Jesus comes to serve. Remember, Jesus is knocking at the door not so He can come in to punish you, but to sit down and eat with you. He is coming to serve. That's perhaps the biggest surprise in our text from Luke 12. We read: **“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.”** The *master* will dress himself for service. This aligns with what we hear elsewhere in the Gospels, **“even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**” Jesus came to serve.

As we stay dressed for action, Jesus dresses himself for service. Next year, be always on the lookout for ways in which Jesus can serve you. But you don't have to look far. We see this service first of all in what He has done for humanity. He was born, lived, died, and rose again for the salvation of humanity. He suffered for your sake.

But from this flows the ways in which He comes to us even tonight. He comes through servants like myself who are stewards of the mysteries of God as I proclaim the forgiveness of your sins on Christ's behalf. I preach to you His word, and later in this service, I preside at a table where you don't eat with Jesus, but you consume His body and blood for your forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Jesus is serving you through answered prayers, through daily devotions, and through private reading of Scripture. He is serving you as He is interceding before the Father on your behalf in the heavenly realms. He is serving you as He and the Father send the Holy Spirit into your heart who enlivens you and gives you the ability to believe.

All of this, of course, points forward to when Jesus will come again in glory to bring about the new heaven and the new earth, where there will be no more night and no more darkness, no more sin and no more sorrow. That is what Jesus is inviting us to prepare for as He calls us to stay awake spiritually.

Maybe the reason I'm such a New Year's Eve grinch is that I never have anything to keep me busy: no New Year's Eve parties or special activities. However, I've been known to push the needle closer to midnight on nights other than New Year's Eve when one of my hobbies such as video games or curling is involved. Suddenly the time evaporates, and I stay up later than I should.

Staying awake in Christ is something that we too can be excited about. It's more exciting than seeing the fireworks over Grandad's Bluff. To be served by Christ and to serve Him is indeed a beautiful thing. As we consider the New Year, cast off your apathy, and get excited. While you're at it, share that excitement with a friend. There's more to life than finances, fitness, or having fun. Knowing Jesus improves all our aspects of life. There's a world of nones and Christmas and Easter Christians who need to hear this good, exciting news.