

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on Revelation 3:1 – 6**  
**Theme: “Wake up, sleepy-head!”**

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***Introduction:***

You may have heard the story of the woman who went along to a fairly traditional church, and really enjoyed the traditional music and the liturgy, *the sung responses*, of that church. She went to the pastor of that church and she apparently said, “I love your music *and your lethargy*” (*New Daylight, Jan-April 2000, p. 151*). She meant “your liturgy”, but she said “your lethargy”, which means “your state of being sleep and inactive”.

Now if she really did mean “lethargy”, *rather than “liturgy”*, then Sardis would have been her ideal church. It had a reputation for life, but in reality it was spiritually asleep, even spiritually dead. Listen to what the risen, exalted Lord Jesus had to say to the church at Sardis through the apostle John:

**“This is the message from the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know what you are doing; I know that you have the reputation of being alive, even though you are dead! So wake up, and strengthen what you still have before it dies completely.**

**For I find that what you have done is not yet perfect in the sight of my God. Remember, then what you were taught and what you heard; obey it and turn from your sins (*lit. “repent”*). If you do not wake up, I will come upon you like a thief, and you will not even know the time when I will come.**

**But a few of you there in Sardis have kept your clothes clean. You will walk with me, clothed in white, because you are worthy to do so. Those who win the victory will be clothed like this in white, and I will not remove their names from the book of the living. In the presence of my Father and his angels, I will declare openly that they belong to me... (*Rev. 3:1-5*).**

The church at Sardis, it seems, had a reputation for life, but in reality, Jesus says, most of the Christians there were spiritually asleep, or worse still spiritually dead. Listen to what one writer says about this church:

Perhaps *the church at Sardis* had all the forms of church life – worship, prayer, service– but these were all empty shells.... Most of its members were nominal Christians, outwardly religious but with no inner reality.

As Jesus looked through *their facade, their outward appearance*, he did not find any of their works perfect, that is, complete or adequate. *Their works were empty because they were not motivated by the Holy Spirit. The description that Jesus used for himself in addressing this church assured them that he had the fullness of the Holy Spirit and that he was able to fill their empty forms with reality.*

He warned them that unless they repented, *that is, woke up to their condition, confessed their hypocrisy, and asked the Holy Spirit to fill them, then he would come in judgement on them* (Onstad, *Courage for Today*, p. 22).

Which brings us to our church here, and the situation of us here.... What would Jesus say to us in our church here? Would he accuse *us* of being lifeless as a church and lifeless as individual Christians?

I don't think so, because I see many signs of life and vitality in our Christian community here: ranging from our worship and Lighthouse Kids on Sundays, through to our various cross-cultural ministries during the week *including Playgroup, Grace over Lunch, Mainly music, Friday ministries, coffee and chat, and our English classes*, through to KYB groups and other Bible study groups, through to individual acts of love and faithfulness to Jesus....

But perhaps what Jesus' words to the church in Sardis remind us of, though, is the danger of lethargy in our Christian community *and in our own life as a Christian*. So, this morning

I thought that we would look at some of the ways in which it is possible to be lethargic as a Christian, *that is, tired and sleepy as a Christian, and to ask ourselves, "Is this me!?"*

## 1) Faith

Firstly, it is possible to be lethargic in our "faith". No, more than that, it is possible to think that we have faith, when in reality we have none. Let me explain. As a pastor, I have visited many people who have said to me: **"Pastor, I'm a Christian. I believe"**.

By that they mean simply that they think they are a Christian because they believe in God, *that is, believe that God exists*, or they mean that they've learnt at Sunday School or at Confirmation what Christianity is about, and that they accept that Jesus suffered and died on the cross for them.

But being a Christian, having faith in Jesus as your Saviour, is much more than simply confessing the right formulae. It is much more than knowing intellectually that Jesus is your Saviour, and that he suffered and died on the cross for you. Even Satan knows that: that God's Son, Jesus, suffered and died on the cross for the sins of human beings.

No, for faith to be genuine, it has to also involve trust. In fact, faith is essentially "trusting in someone or something", and Christian faith is trusting in God as your dear Father and in Jesus as your Saviour.

I like the illustration that Harry Wendt drew up about faith as part of his Divine Drama Bible study series. Faith in Jesus as our Saviour involves not just knowledge, or even knowledge and assent, but it also involves "confidence" or trust.

One story that I know that brings this out dramatically is the story of Blondin, the famous tight-rope walker of the 1930's, and his challenge to the spectators who were watching him walk on a tight-rope across Niagara Falls in America. Apparently, after walking across the Niagara Falls on a tightrope, he turned to the spectators and made a sensational offer:

**He would cross the falls again, this time with someone on his back. Who was willing to go? No one rushed forward to accept the offer. So, picking a man at random, Blondin asked him, "Do you believe that I am able to carry you across?"**

**"Yes, sir", came the unhesitating reply.**

**"Well, then, let's go", Blondin answered.**

**"Not on your life!", the man replied, and the man withdrew into the crowd.**

And so it went on. One after another expressed...*belief* in the tightrope walker, but no one would agree to let Blondin take him across. Finally, a young fellow moved towards the front of the crowd. Blondin repeated his question: **"Do you believe I can carry you across safely?"**

**“Yes, I do!”, the young man said.**

**“Are you willing to let me?”, asked Blondin.**

**“As a matter of fact, I am”, the young man answered.**

**The young man climbed onto the expert’s back. Blondin stepped onto the rope, paused momentarily, then moved across the falls without difficulty. There were many in that crowd who believed that Blondin could do it. But there was only one who was willing to trust him to do it (*Green, Illustrations, p. 137*).**

So, there is a big difference between mere belief, and true faith which involves trusting in the person concerned. Likewise, faith in Jesus as one’s Saviour is much more than merely nodding assent to this proposition. It is a trusting of one’s future to Jesus (*cf. Luke 18:9-14; “Lord, have mercy. Let that sacrifice be for me!”*)

It is a grabbing hold of the life buoy which is Jesus, and hanging on for dear life. It is saying to Jesus:

**“Thank you, Lord Jesus, for suffering and dying for us all on the cross. Let what you did there for us all, be for me”.**

Or it is praying to God:

**Dear God, I’ve mucked up and messed up in life. Thank you that Jesus on the cross suffered my punishment and my judgement. Forgive me, Father, for Jesus’ sake.**

So that’s one area of Christian life where it is possible to be asleep or even dead: in the area of our faith. Our faith is alive and vital when we are clinging to Jesus as our Saviour, and *trusting* that he suffered and died for us (*cf. Addendum re “Have I got enough faith?”*)

## **2) Love**

Secondly, it is possible to be lethargic in our Christianity in the area of the way we live our life. I’ve known people who say to themselves:

**“I’m God’s forgiven child because I trust in Jesus as my Saviour. So, now I can do what I like. God will forgive me, that’s His business!”.**

But such a viewpoint reflects a real sleepiness so far as one’s relationship with God is concerned. It’s a viewpoint that reflects the lack of a real, loving relationship with God.

I love the way that Philip Yancey points this out in his book, *What's so amazing about grace?* Let me read to you what he has to say there:  
**Would a groom on *the night before his wedding* hold the following conversation with his bride? “Honey, I love you so much, and I’m eager to spend my life with you. But I need to work out a few details. After we’re married, how far can I go with other women? Can I sleep with them? Kiss them? You don’t mind a few affairs now and then, do you?”**

**I know it might hurt you, but just think of all the opportunities you’ll have to forgive me after I betray you!”**

**To such a Don Juan, the only reasonable response is a slap in the face and a “God forbid!”. Obviously, he does not understand the first thing about love (p. 189-190).**

Love of God shows itself in actions of love towards God, and in a desire to do God’s will, just as love for one’s marriage partner expresses itself in actions of love and doing what you know pleases your spouse.

And it is incredibly dangerous to your faith to turn your back deliberately on going the way that you know that God wants you to go! Philip Yancey also points this out in his book, as he tells the story of a conversation that he had with a friend whom he calls “Daniel”. Listen to what Philip Yancey writes:

**Late one night I sat in a restaurant and listened as Daniel confided to me that he had decided to leave his wife after fifteen years of marriage. He had found someone younger and prettier, someone who “makes me feel alive, like I haven’t felt in years”. He and his wife had no strong incompatibilities. He simply wanted a change, like a man who gets an itch for a newer model car....**

**I listened to Daniel’s story with sadness and grief, saying little as I tried to absorb the news. Then, during the dessert course, he dropped the bombshell: “Actually, Philip, I have an agenda. The reason I wanted to see you tonight was to ask you a**

**question that’s been bothering me. You study the Bible. Do you think God can forgive something as awful as I am about to do?”....**

**Here is what I told my friend Daniel, in a nutshell. “Can God forgive**

you? Of course. You know the Bible. God uses murderers and adulterers. For goodness sake, a couple of scoundrels named Peter and Paul led the New Testament church.

Forgiveness is *our* problem, not God's. What we have to go through to commit sin distances us from God – we change in the very act of rebellion – and there is no guarantee we will ever come back. You ask me about forgiveness now, but will you even want it later, especially if it involves repentance?"

Several months after our conversation, Daniel made his choice and left his family. I have yet to see evidence of repentance. Now he tends to rationalise his decision as a way of escaping an unhappy marriage. He has branded most of his former friends "too narrow-minded and judgmental", and looks instead for people who celebrate his newfound liberation.

To me, though, Daniel does not seem very liberated. The price of "freedom" has meant turning his back on those who cared about him most. He also tells me God is not part of his life right now. "Maybe later", he says (*p. 179-180*).

It is incredibly dangerous to your faith to turn your back deliberately on going the way that you know that God wants you to go!

So, in the area of our response to God's love and His forgiveness of us, it is possible to be lethargic: to be half-asleep, or even half-dead in our life as God's children.

### **3) Outreach**

Thirdly, and lastly for this morning, it is possible to be lethargic as God's children in the way that we share with others about God's love, and His forgiveness through Jesus.

The picture that comes into my mind as I think about sharing the Good News about God's love and His forgiveness is the picture of people drowning in a river. That's a picture of the reality that exists in our society: all around us, there are people drowning as they struggle to swim in the river of life. How can we not reach out a hand to help them and to rescue them, by telling them about how much God loves them, how He offers forgiveness through Jesus, and how He offers to change their life

completely and utterly for the better!?

Yet many of us walk along the bank of the river, so to speak, in a sort of dazed, sleepy way, thinking to ourselves, “I can’t do anything *much* to help them, *and well the important thing is that I’m safe and secure*”.

What would Jesus say to us if he were here today? Well, I’m sure he’d say something like this:

**“Look, I understand that you’re shy, or that maybe you feel embarrassed to talk about me to others. But how can you not!? How can you not tell others about what I’ve done for them!?”**

**To shut up and to say nothing is to let them drown, and to let them end up separated from God forever in Hell! How can you do that!? Repent! And use every opportunity that I give you to try and rescue those whom I have placed around you!”.**

### ***Conclusion:***

I chose as our theme for today, the statement, “Wake up, sleepy-head!” Maybe it’s a bit corny as a theme,, but this is what Jesus was saying in effect to the Christians in Sardis, and this is what Jesus says to each of us, if we are lethargic in any areas of our life as God’s children. So, “Wake up, sleepy-head!!”

In our Bible reading, Jesus describes himself as “the one who has the seven spirits of God”.

Jesus has the fullness of the Holy Spirit at his disposal, and he wants to give us His Spirit to empower us to live as God’s children in all areas of our life. Let’s ask Jesus to do that now so that we might be fully awake in all areas of our life as God’s child.

Let’s pray:

**Dear Lord Jesus,**

**Thank you for dying on the cross for us, so that we might be God’s forgiven children. Fill us we your Spirit, so that we go on trusting in you as our Saviour, so that we are like you in all that we do, and so that we have the same passion as you do for reaching out to those who drowning around us. Amen.**

May God bless us as we allow Jesus to fill us with his Spirit so that we are more and more like Jesus in all that we are.

### ***Addendum:***

Talking about “faith” like this can lead us at times to think, “Have I got enough faith?” At times like this, I think we need to go back to focussing on our Baptism. When you and I were baptised, we were adopted into His family as His dear children, *and He’s not going to let you and me go without a fight* 😊

The Good News is that you and I *are* God’s dear children through our Baptism *and our faith, however strong or weak that may be....*

You know, parents want their children to grow to their potential.... That’s what God wants for your life and mine: that we grow to our potential, and be the best possible child that we can be.