



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 30, 2022

Pastor James Enderle

Lenten Midweek 5

First Lesson: [Isaiah 29:13-16](#)

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Revelation 3:1-6](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 24:42-51](#)

Sardis: Lethargy—Slow Death

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

I think often when we speak about sleep, it's always a thing that we are wanting more of. There are a lot of people who are sleep deprived, not getting enough sleep. We hear more and more stories of how we need to sleep. It's one of the most important things. Due to all sorts of things (technology, to our live styles, to stress, to parents having kids that are awake), it's hard to get sleep. You're always hearing "Get your sleep. You need more sleep."

But when is there advice to not be asleep? When do we need to be awakened and checked if we're sleeping too much? It doesn't happen very often, but we see it in Revelation today. There is encouragement to wake up. The people are asleep.

I think in our life there are a few times that happens. We always love in October when we get an extra hour of time and can sleep a little bit more. But we just had that change in time where you move the clock up and we have to make sure the alarm is going off and we set our clocks right because we don't want to sleep through, especially as a pastor. We don't want to miss church if we are preaching. Then I think of other times where maybe you have an early flight. That is one of those times when you don't want to be caught asleep. You know you have to get to the airport and if you wake up after sleeping too much, it's not good. You have to hurry and rush. Those are a few instances in life where we know what it's like to be caught sleeping or where we don't want to be sleeping.

When we look at Sardis and the words that Jesus gives to them, we see some people who are sleeping. He first introduces the letter to them and these words. ***"These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars."*** This is a similar introduction that He has in other letters of His to the churches, like the letter in

Ephesians. These seven spirits represent the Holy Spirit. With the seven stars He is talking about those who bring the Word, those pastors of those churches. God has the Spirit and these pastors in His hands and He is sharing His Word with the people. This is what He is giving them and what He holds. Then He says this: ***“I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”*** We hear that similar reference in the Gospel we read today about a thief coming in the night of those caught asleep when the thief comes. God wants us to be prepared. This church has been asleep. God’s Word is telling them to not be caught in this way. It says their reputation is one of being alive, but they are dead. What has caused them to be asleep?

Did you notice one thing about this letter that is a little bit different than the other letters that we’ve read to the churches? This church has no word of there being any persecution going on in the area. Some of the other churches are enduring hard persecution and He is encouraging them to stand firm. In other churches there is strong false teaching that is going on. There are these battles from inside and from out to have the right teachings. But here in Sardis, we don’t have either of those things. What do you notice? Things have been going smoothly. No persecution. No false teaching. When things are smooth and easy, what is easy to happen? It’s easy to get into a lull and to fall asleep. Or you could lose your focus on what is important.

Sometimes we need to be tested in order to see and stand firm. Here they have this reputation but it’s not true. Their hearts are far from them. Their deeds are not really there. They are falling asleep.

How does that happen in our world and for them? I think for them it’s because there is no persecution. There is no false teaching. And for churches today, can that happen where we start to fall asleep? There is no real testing and everything just seems fine. People are coming and there are no big issues. Are we literally awake to what is going on and are people slowly and slowly drifting? In the picture drifting asleep here but also possibly drifting away. Drifting away from what is important. He comes and says, “I have the Spirit and these stars, the pastors and the Holy Spirit and the Word. There are some who are slowly drifting, drifting off, away from the Word.”

As I think about falling asleep in these pictures and being caught asleep, I think another picture that we need to see for them (because they don’t notice it) is they think they are alive. Of course if they are dying or if they knew there was a problem, they would try to fix it. He says He sees their deeds even though they don’t really see it. So what is this? This is like a blind spot. Most often when we think of blind spots is when we drive and we have those blind spots next to us. Now we have the little monitors to tell us even

when a car is in our blind spot. Why; because we can't see it. The essence of a blind spot is that you are blind to it. So if we want to see what our blind spots are or fix our blind spots, how can one do that? How can we see what needs to be done?

When He is speaking to Sardis, He is saying something really needs to change. He says "You're about to die. Strengthen what remains. You are about to die." But then later He says, ***"Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you."*** They don't see what is going on but they need to repent. They need to figure out what it is and to repent. What is their blind spot? It focuses a little bit on deeds but most of all that drifting away from God's Word.

What is our blind spot? What is your blind spot? I think as we look at blind spots, we can look at it both as a church, as a greater community, and also personally. What blind spots might our church be falling into, that we've drifted into, that it's just how things go, that's how we do it and maybe we don't notice how this is a failing? Where are we really missing something that we should be doing? Or doing something that might not quite be right? How do you figure that out? I think sometimes the way we can do that as a church is to put ourselves in the place of someone else. You come in and you know how things go. You know how things function and you've maybe been coming for years, maybe your whole life. Put yourself in the place of someone who is entering the church for the first time. Maybe even entering a church for the first time in a long, long time and is almost foreign to Christianity. What things are going to be odd or different for them and how are we, as a church, helping them to know Jesus, to get connected to Jesus and to feel comfortable? How can we do that? I think we are doing that in ways, but also put yourself in their place and think of what blind spots do we have to things that we're just not aware of because that's how we do it and that's not things I think about because I don't need to and it doesn't really affect me.

Then what about you, as an individual Christian? What blind spots are there in your life and faith? In what areas is God speaking to you and saying "Repent"? Again, this is exactly what He is talking about, repentance. We speak about repentance all the time, but think about it in an idea of what your blind spots are. How easy is it to repent of your blind spots? You don't know them. You don't see them. So what are the ways that you can figure out your blind spots?

Maybe to have those people close to you that are going to be honest with you and point out the sins that you're not thinking about or the sins you don't want to admit. Maybe that is a spouse that you can be open and honest to and can communicate and share with. Maybe it's a really good friend. Maybe it's a fellow Christian here. Maybe it's a cousin or a relative, a brother or a sister. Someone who is open and honest that maybe it's something you do over and over and over again and you maybe don't want to change it. Maybe you've grown into a lull. You've fallen asleep to that sin and need

to be awakened and have someone point out that this is wrong. You need someone to point out your blind spots. If they don't, what is going to keep on happening? You're not going to notice your blind spots. If you don't have that person, maybe in some situations (again like we talked about the church) put yourself in the place of others. Think about the things you do and say and think about how others might be reacting to those things or how they might react. We have to be aware of our blind spots and look for them and discover them because the whole point of them is that they are hard to find. But those things will dig deep down into us. Just like a little sliver that if it goes unattended, it will dig down deep.

For Sardis, the people there had this great reputation. Maybe on the outside things seemed fine and they covered up a lot of the problems and others saw them as a good group of people. But God knew their hearts. God knew how they had been drifting away and falling asleep and ignoring those blind spots. He tells them to wake up, to be aware that He is going to come back and if He catches them sleeping, if He catches them without faith, with these deeds digging into them and tearing apart their faith and them growing further from God, they will remain dead.

He gives them an encouragement in Verse 4. He says, ***"Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels."*** What makes these people worthy? What gives them this white clothing? Is it the fact that they, themselves, are worthy? That they've done great things? Remember what He is calling the people of Sardis to do; to repent and to seek God for forgiveness. These are the ones who know that they have sinned. They go to God for forgiveness and they are clothed in Christ. The only thing that can clothe us in white is Christ. Otherwise we are unworthy.

In that parable about the banquet feast that Jesus speaks about, there are some who come into the banquet and they are dressed in their own clothes. They thought they could come in on their own. He says, "Throw them out! They aren't wearing the banquet clothes." They aren't wearing the clothes of Christ. We need to be awake but not awake and empowered by our own deeds or the things that we have done. We need to be alive in Christ; alive in our Lord and clothed in Him. How do we do that but to go back to how the letter starts; to be focused on the Word.

When you are asleep, sometimes you need that alarm to wake you up. Sometimes we need the Word, the Law to wake us up. When we've been blind to our mistakes and our flaws and our sins, we need the Word to guide us and to wake us up and show us our sins. But then we also need God's Word to show us that we have a Savior; one that clothes us and removes every stain and wrinkle, because on our own, even if we point

out those sins and mistakes, we're still covered in that filth. We need Christ and we need to be clothed in Him and to live in Him.

When we're awake in Him, when we see His Word and we live in His Word and grow in it, what does it do? It changes us. It changes us to love God and to be awake and learning daily and growing as much as we can, to know our Savior more. What does that do, when we learn about His love? We want to go out with deeds of love. That's the other issue that is missing. He said "I see your deeds," and their deeds were far from them. They weren't getting filled up with God's love to love others.

How much work can you do when you're asleep? Not much. When we're sleeping at night, there is no work you can do. When we're blind to our issues and trying to get things done, we're going to make a lot of mistakes and probably run over some people and issues in our lives. When we're awake and seeing clearly, when we see His Word and grow in it, we live in His love and we love (filled with His love) to love others.

In your life, examine what things are causing you to sleep. Maybe how you have ignored other things and it caused you to drift away. As a church, as a whole, as a Christian, see what your blind spots are. If you aren't sure, take some time to ask someone that you know, that you love, and that cares for you and is going to be honest with you. Why is it important? It's because we need to wake up. We need to see our sins and repent. When we do, we know the Lord is there. We know He is always going to clothe us with His righteousness and forgiveness. These are the Words that the Lord has for the church in Sardis but also the Lord's Words for us. Knowing that those who are clothed with His righteousness, clothed in faith and forgiveness, He will never blot out their name. They will be with Him in eternity. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.