

[BLANK] [PRAYER] Did you remember to reset your clocks for Daylight Savings Time? Whether you remembered or not, may God bless you for waking up in time for church, in spite of losing an hour of sleep. Somehow, we all remembered to wake up, and to come. May we all thank God for the blessed gift of awakening. We need awakenings every day, and we need to remember every day how God is calling us to a special kind of awakening, our awakening to how God wants save us for a new way of life.

There was once an awakening that made two very ordinary people very special. [WASHKANSKY] Some of you may remember Louis Washkansky. But probably, you don't. For most of his life, Louis Washkansky was nobody special, a former soldier, a grocer, someone who loved playing sports. [DARVALL] It's even less likely that you remember Denise Darvall, a young woman who worked at a bank, and who lived a fairly unremarkable life. Louis and Denise never knew one another, but on December 3rd, 1967, their lives became closer than any other lives before in human history. You see, it was on that day that the heart of Denise Darvall, who had just died in a tragic car accident, was transplanted into the chest of Louis Washkansky. It was the very first human heart transplant.

[LOUIS ON BED] Louis awoke from that operation with the heart from Denise beating in his chest, his old, diseased heart a thing of the past. [BOTH PHOTO] Louis had awakened to a life that relied completely on Denise's heart, every breath, every motion, every thought. He could do nothing without the heart that came from Denise. His life relied completely on it. His smile, a smile of joy, for a death sentence that had been turned into a life sentence, relied completely on it.

Denise's heart did its job well. Unfortunately, the medicines that kept Louis' body from rejecting her heart exposed him to a pneumonia infection. Louis died eighteen days after receiving Denise's heart. [BLANK] For a short time, Louis Washkansky, an ordinary man, and Denise Darvall, an ordinary woman, were, together, the most extraordinary life in human history. And in just a short time, that life would never awaken again.

[EYES] Awakening is something that we may take for granted. Awakening is something that tells us that our heart is still working, our lungs are still working, and that it is time for us to open our eyes, and begin the next part of the story that we call life. Denise lost her lifetime of awakenings at a very young age. Louis, a 54 year-old man in poor health, wanted to have a chance for just a few more awakenings. As we look at their simple lives transformed by this miracle of medicine, perhaps we can remember how valuable each awakening that we have can be. [BLANK]

And yet, all the awakenings in all of our lives bring us only to the root of what a human life can do. What if there was another kind of awakening, a kind that would give us a new source of life, a source of life that would allow our body and our souls to fill up with something that was completely a gift, completely not our own, something that we relied on for every moment of our life, something that was inseparable from our lives, like the heart of Denise was from Louis, but still our own lives?

We have a gift like that available to us today. It's called grace. [GRACE] Grace is the gift of abundant love that comes from God and God alone, love that we cannot buy at any price, love that we can never do anything to deserve, no more than we could make the sun rise. [JOHN 3:16] The famous words of John 3:16 tell us what grace is all about: "For God so loved the world, that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life." Countless people through history have heard God's promise of grace in these words, and come to faith in Jesus Christ, people who needed to hear that God's love in Jesus Christ is a gift of grace for the world, offered to everyone through the gift of faith in Jesus the Christ, the savior of the world. And this is not an exclusive offer. God wants the WORLD to come to salvation in Jesus Christ. The words of John 3:17 affirms this. [JOHN 3:17] "For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." Faith in Jesus as the Son of God awakens a saving grace that God wants for the whole world, not just some, and, even, for us. [BLANK]

God wants everyone in the world to awaken to a new life through faith, through our awakening to the real and living presence of God's grace in our lives. God wants us to be aware not just that God exists, but that God truly lives in us through faith in Jesus Christ, as we seek to live in God as Jesus did. [HEART FIRE] As surely as Denise's heart beat inside Louis' chest for a few days, God wants us to awaken to the heart of Jesus beating in our chests, now, and forever, our hearts beating with the heart of Jesus in God's Holy Spirit as one heart. The heart of the one true God wants to beat in us on earth, as in heaven. [BLANK]

And just as Louis did nothing to deserve his new heart other than needing it, there is truly nothing that we can do to deserve this gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The awakening of faith is like our awakening in the morning. We awaken not of our own will, but because it is the time to awaken. The light, the sounds of the day, call to us, and, without thinking or doing anything, we respond. God invites us to awaken to God's gift of grace, so that we may respond to grace with Christ in our hearts in everything we do. [EPHESIANS - MORE COMING] As the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2 says: "For by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast. [MORE EPHESIANS] For we are God's good creations, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

[BLANK] There is a reason that we are asked through faith to return to God. There is a reason that we are asked by God through faith to purify our hearts, to commit ourselves to seeking God, and to practice the ways of faith. The reason that we do these things in faith is to awaken what God has prepared to be our way of life, since before we were ever born. [FOETUS] The moment that we were conceived in our mothers, a story was conceived, a story of how God's plan of goodness could unfold in the world through our lives, the same story that was conceived in the baby Jesus in his mother Mary, by the Holy Spirit, a story of living life as a gift from God, every day. [BLANK]

All that we need to live a life of faith has been given to us by God already. We have the hearts, the minds, the bodies, the souls, given to us by God, as gifts of grace, to be who God meant us to be, so that we can do what God has meant us to do. In our everyday lives, we forget that God's awakening was meant to happen in us every day. That is why we must practice our faith: it allows our hearts to awaken to the heart of Christ beating in our chest, and the world's chest, and to be liberated from the fears of being without this hope of everlasting love in our lives.

One day, many years ago, I was coming off a train, at the end of a day. I had begun to practice a life of faith, reading a chapter of the Bible every night on the way home from work. The chapter I read that evening was Ephesians 2. The words of verses 8-10 awakened something in my heart. As I walked to my car, God's Holy Spirit changed where I was going. My footsteps were going in the same direction, but it was no longer my path. It was God's path, prepared beforehand, to be my way of life. That evening, Jesus came to me as I was preparing to pray. I don't know why. I don't know how. All I know is that I have never awakened alone since that time.

We will all find God's awakening in our lives in different ways. We may see the path, and then run away from it, but we will never be able to unsee the path that God awakens in our hearts. We know where God wants us to go. God wants us to go to heaven, and to walk towards heaven as if we were already in it, loving this world as God so loved it in Jesus, and helping the world to look like that original, shining story that God has prepared for us since before we were born. Return to God. Purify your hearts. Commit yourselves to seeking out God. Practice the faith that God wants us to have. And then, in ways that we will never be able to predict or expect, let God awaken God's grace in your heart. Amen.