

## **In Nomine Iesu**

### **The Second Sunday in Advent 2024**

#### **What does it mean to be ready for our Lord's return? - Luke 12:35-40**

“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. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who will return to gather His people. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

If the text before us today sounds familiar to you, it is because it is used in the rite of Christian burial that we use all the time. In the past year there have been many funerals here at Parkland. In some cases, it was for someone we knew who was near death, in others it was for someone who, although did not seem near death, was at an age where we were not overly surprised, but in some others it was for someone whose death came very unexpectedly; and we were all shocked.

#### **I**

When speaking about the last day, whether our own last day or the day of our Lord Jesus Christ's visible return to earth, the Holy Scriptures use different illustrations. In one His return is compared to lightning as it flashes across the sky, in another to a thief in the night, in another as a snare that catches unwary animals, in another of the bridegroom coming suddenly in the night as the bridesmaids wait to accompany Him into the wedding hall. Today's lesson illustrates that day in yet another way: it will be like a master returning home in the middle of the night.

The servants are all home in the master's house as they wait for his return from a feast. Three things are true of the servants in Jesus' illustration. First, they are dressed “for action” – as our text says - and ready to welcome him. Second, their lamps are burning, filling the house with light. Third, they are waiting for him to come to the door so that they can quickly open it to him. In other words, they are awake and ready. Let us consider each of the three ... and then a fourth one.

What does it mean to be dressed for action? One of the most common and important pictures in the word of God is the robe of righteousness that was placed on us at our baptism. This robe belongs to our Lord, for He is the one who actually fashioned it throughout His life, living as we have not and could not. He wove it seamlessly from top to bottom with the unbroken thread of His own pure and sinless thoughts, words, and deeds. He gives it to us freely, by grace, without any of our own works added, which is why it is perfect and clean. It is this robe, given to us by our Lord, which we fasten in such a way around us that we can go out and work while it is day, before the night comes when no one can work. None of the actions, the work,

we do while dressed in this way is done for ourselves, for we need no such works. We already have every good and perfect deed credited to us in Christ. No, this robe simply enables us to do all that we do for others who need our help in this life. It enables us to be instruments through which our Lord can bless others.

What does it mean to keep our lights burning? Well, as with the parable of the ten virgins, five kept their lamps burning because they brought oil with them. That is, they were continuously filling their vessels with the oil of gladness, the good news of forgiveness, which they received through the word and sacraments. And so, their light of life shone in the darkness of this world and became known to men.

What does it mean to wait for our Master to return? It certainly does not mean that we sit on a chair next to the door of our death waiting anxiously and sleeplessly to hear His knock. How pointless would that be? Especially since we do not have any idea when He will return. How lacking in faith? No, it just means that at whatever point Jesus does return we are carrying out our vocations as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, colleagues and neighbors, guided by the lamp of faith we hold to lighten our way, and that we are ready at any time to put it down and welcome Him, who has come to take us home to heaven.

## II

There is a fourth thing that is true of all the servants in Jesus' illustration. It is in a powerful way the most comforting of all. What is it? What also do His servants all have in common? Why are none singled out as being unready for His return?

To help you, let's go back in history, go back all the way to the time of Jesus. There is good indication that one of the first of the early church worship sites – if not the very first – was in Jerusalem near the Garden of Gethsemane. The house belonged to the mother of Mark the Evangelist. There the disciples of Jesus gathered in His name on those first Sundays that followed the first Easter. There one or the other of the apostles preached to them. There they received in faith the Supper their Lord had instituted for them with His command and promise to be present with His body and blood to convey to them the forgiveness He had won for them. How many of those who were present at those services hadn't really heard His knock on their own door during His earthly ministry and opened it to welcome Him in? Martha, Mary, and Lazarus certainly had. Peter had. Zachaeus had. Others also. All knew that it was Jesus, whose promise to be present with those who gathered in His name, transformed their house into His house, transformed them - poor, miserable sinners all - into His servants, set their darkened hearts alight with the light of His grace and mercy. All were busy going about their day-to-day vocations, every day dressed for action, lamps alight, as they walked the streets of Jerusalem as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, co-workers and citizens, neighbors and friends, and then returned to their home church at the beginning of each new week to be with Jesus in word and sacrament. They were used to welcoming Him into their presence. You see, He was preparing them for their last day. And through the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which you have heard in Sunday School, Bible study, sermons, and your own reading, He has been preparing you too.

Dear friends, in baptism you were clothed in Christ's own righteousness and made worthy to stand before Him; in the absolution, which you hear week after week,

your baptismal robe of righteousness is again made spotless as the day Christ first clothed you in it, readied once more to go out into the world as His servants helping others; in the preached gospel your eyes are lifted up from earthly things to the ways of God, readied to accept His timing in all things even in respect to your own death; in the sacrament of Christ's body and blood you have been welcoming Him with joy into your presence. In other words, you too know what it is to be a servant in His house, your heart alit with the light of faith. You have been preparing to welcome Him whenever He will come to take you home.

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As we day by day draw nearer and nearer to Christmas, and the celebration once more of the birth of our Savior, we see more clearly the nature of the gift God, who so loved the world, gave to all on Christmas morning. He gave to us His own Son, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger, so that we could be wrapped in His righteousness and stand before Him without fear, ready to open to Him when He comes for us. Let us rejoice in Him whose righteousness is given us so freely and fully week after week, Sunday after Sunday. Let us say: I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**