

Pastor Kenneth Mars
St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE
New Year's Eve
December 31, 2014
Text: Luke 12:35–40

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Janus was the Roman god of gates and doors as well as the god of beginnings. He is most often depicted as being two-faced; this doesn't mean he was a deceiver, rather, it indicated that he looked back to past and forward to the future. It appears January is named after Janus. It's the month connected to the past year while also being the beginning of the New Year, the future.

This is the time of the year that we are compelled to consider the past and the future. The various forms of modern media annually submit "the year in review" type materials and programs. New Year's resolutions still seem to be common. So often, the resolutions made in the previous year weren't completed as hoped so they get recycled for the next year.

The Bible doesn't really have a concept like New Year's resolutions. Instead, it uses the term "repentance" which quite literally means a "change of mind." From a Biblical perspective, Christians don't typically make resolutions to do better but repent (turn their minds and consequently their lives) from evil or harmful ways and pursue faith, virtue, and godliness. In addition, the Bible doesn't really discuss typical New Year's resolution topics like weight loss, exercise programs, pursuing new hobbies, and the like.

There are two possible exceptions: Paul tells Timothy that "bodily exercise is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (I Tim. 4:8). The apostle also tells Timothy to "no longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments" (I Tim. 5:23). It seems Timothy needed to exercise a little more and alter his diet, both for the sake of his physical health and notice this, so that his ministry can continue as effectively as possible. It's the best I could do!

Tonight's gospel reading from Luke 12 does set before us a theme that is quite pervasive in all of Holy Scripture. On this night of transition from the old year to the new, it is good and proper that we consider it briefly. But please, do not hear Christ's words as a

religious New Year's resolution. This Christian discipline applies to 365 days of the year. It's faithful readiness or vigilant watchfulness.

Jesus says, "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" (vs. 35–36). Using the common occurrence of a wedding, Jesus instructs His Church that they must be faithful in their readiness to serve and live out their most holy faith. Ancient Jewish weddings could last for days. And the household servants never knew exactly when the bridegroom would come back. The servants had to be ready to serve at any given moment.

So we must stay dressed for action. We never know when the opportunity for faithful service may arise. In fact, each day provides occasions to love Jesus by loving our neighbor. All Christian faith and devotion begins at home. (*Repeat*) Too often we get distracted from living in faithful readiness. And yet, it's not all that mysterious. Faithful readiness is found in husbands and wives loving and serving each other in the ordinary responsibilities of life; pretty mundane but it's godly and well pleasing to the Lord. Faithful readiness is found in parents training their children with godly discipline. Or you comforting lonely friends, family, or neighbor with your physical presence. Or you being the best employee or employer possible. It's even found in you being an informed, active citizen who fulfills his or her public duties with virtue and godliness. You name it... faithful readiness is to be found in every area of our lives, even our desires, emotions, thoughts, and hopes. Don't be distracted from faithful readiness.

But if we would stay dressed for action through God's Word, prayer, and a willingness to see people and life outside of our own needs and desires, we would find more opportunities to love and serve Jesus through others than we could possibly ever fulfill. The Small Catechism provides a simple but profound phrase to help us stay dressed and ready for action "Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker?" (Small Catechism V:Confession) And then there's that little used section in the Small Catechism, The Table of Duties which provides a list of Bible passages regarding "...various holy orders and positions, admonishing them about their duties and responsibilities." Topics include: civil government, citizens, husbands, wives, parents, children, workers of all kinds, employers and supervisors, youth, widows, to everyone. The Lord Jesus calls us to be faithful in our readiness to live and serve with godliness and virtue.

Jesus declares this kind of life to be blessed indeed. "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes" (vs. 37a). By fulfilling your various God-given

vocations, you find blessings that transcend the fleeting promises the world offers. The very things that New Year's resolutions typically promise to give if fulfilled. Remember what Paul told Timothy regarding physical exercise...it has some limited value but godliness is profitable for this life and the life to come.

And that's another aspect of faithful readiness that we must consider on this New Year's Eve. Jesus is coming again in glory on the Last Day. And this is what He says will happen to those who are dressed and ready for action, "Truly, I say to you, the master (who represents Jesus) will dress himself for service and have them (i.e., the faithful servants) recline at table, and he will come and serve them (i.e., the servants)" (vs. 37b).

Not only is there joy and happiness found by means of faithful readiness in our day to day vocations, but Jesus promises that He, the Master, will serve us in joyful celebration on the triumph of the Last Day. The hinge that links joy in this world and joy in the world to come is faithful readiness. We live our lives in this world for the sake of this world and, at the same time, in anticipation of the next. Nothing could be further from the truth than that old saying, "He's so heavenly minded that he's no earthly good." It's quite the opposite. The more heavenly minded you are the more earthly good you will do. Listen to the Lord's second blessing in vs. 38, "If the master comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!"

But we must be careful to remain ready and awake in our faithfulness lest we are robbed of our blessedness. Jesus warns us in vs. 39-40, "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."

2015 is to be like any other year since the coming of Jesus: faithful readiness in the things of this life and in things of the life to come. To remain ready, we pray. We hear God's Word; we repent of sins, evil, and vice and turn towards Christ in faith, forgiveness, and virtue. We fulfill our daily vocations in simple faithfulness knowing that through them we are loving our neighbors and the Lord Jesus. To live such a life is twice blessed indeed. A Happy and blessed 2015 to you all.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.