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St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE
New Year's Eve
December 31, 2016
Text: Luke 12:35–40

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

In the name of Jesus...Merry Christmas to you all!

If God is for us, who can be against us? That is the question the apostle Paul asks in Romans 8, the beginning verse of tonight's epistle reading. Looking back upon 2016, was God for you? What criteria does one use to answer that question? Health, monetary prosperity, renewed and healed relationships, new adventures and opportunities, or maybe, an overall sense of peace and quietness. If the good outweighs the bad, then God must be for you.

But what if the bad outweighs the good? At times I've heard people say they can't wait for the year to be over. It's been filled with many trials and unexpected adversity. Maybe the new year will be better. IF that's been the kind of year you've had, then was God against you?

The apostle Paul doesn't use these kinds of life's vicissitudes to answer his question. Nor should we. Paul writes these amazing words after asking his question about God being for us, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (vs. 32). Is God for us? Answer: God the Father gave us His beloved Son; His highest and best treasure. That being the case, He is – without any doubt or uncertainty – for us and He will surely give us all things. It's an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God gives us the greater thing – in this case, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to die for our sins and redeem us unto true life now in time and also in eternity – then He will certainly give us the lesser things such as food, drink, house, home, wife, children, land, animals, and all I need to support this body and life.

A few verses later, Paul makes this conclusion absolutely and glorious clear, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This year is coming to a close. God was for you regardless of whatever events happened or didn't happen. All of you enter into the coming year with the same certainty. God is for you. He gave you His beloved Son. His enduring and steadfast love covers all events, all surprises, all hardships, all joys and sorrows, every minute of every day. Nothing in all creation, nothing natural or supernatural will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Having been so loved, then we might ask ourselves how we plan to live out this New Year. From tonight's gospel reading, we heard the Lord's instruction to His disciples. Jesus said, "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... You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

How shall we live out 2017? With the bold and sure confidence that God's love in Christ Jesus covers us in and through all circumstances, we shall live faithfully, eagerly awaiting the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The details of this new year, and of any subsequent years, we will discover as they unfold. We walk by faith, not by sight says Holy Scripture. Stay dressed and ready for action, awaiting the coming of Jesus. The big picture of our lives may not come into clear focus. But God's love remains constant. Complete knowledge of what God is doing in the world will almost certainly but unattainable for us, for anybody for that matter. But stay ready abiding in God's love.

I'd like to share a portion of an essay written by that remarkable 20th century Christian thinker C.S. Lewis. The essay is entitled "The World's Last Night." He describes how living by faith in God is like being an actor in a play. He writes:

The doctrine of the Second Coming teaches us that we do not and cannot know when the world drama will end. The curtain may be rung down at any moment: say, before you have finished reading this paragraph. This seems to some people intolerably frustrating. So many things would be interrupted. Perhaps you were going to get married next month, perhaps you were going to get a raise next week: you may be on the verge of a great scientific discovery; you may be maturing great social and political reforms. Surely no good and wise God would be so very unreasonable as to cut all this short? Not now, of all moments!

But we think thus because we keep on assuming that we know the play. We don't know the play. We do not even know whether we are in Act I or Act V. We do not know who are the major and who are the minor characters. The Author knows. The audience...may have an inkling. But we, never seeing the play from the outside, never meeting any of the characters except the tiny minority who are 'on' in the same scenes as ourselves, wholly ignorant of the future and very imperfectly informed about the past, cannot tell at what moment the end ought to come. That it will come when it ought, we may be sure; but we waste our time in guessing when that will be. That it has meaning we may be sure, but we cannot see it. When it is over we may be told. We are led to believe that the Author will have something to say to each of us on the part that each of us has played. The playing it well is what matters infinitely.

In other words, play your God-given part and do it well. You are covered in the love of God and nothing can separate you from His love. Because of that love most clearly demonstrated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God the Father forgives, restores and invigorates His children with His Holy Spirit. You see, He's the author and finisher of our most holy faith. What He does, He does well. In 2017, be faithful and attentive to the coming of Jesus. God is for you and loves you unto eternal life.

A Merry Christmas to you all and a very Happy and Blessed New Year!!

✠ 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.