

+ Luke 12:35-40 + Are You Ready for a New Year? + New Year's Eve + 31 December 2009 +

The hours are flying by. Soon 2009 and the 2000s will be history. With little time left in this year and decade, I have to ask, **are you ready for a new year?** If you read some of the end-of-the-year articles, you definitely get the impression that people are ready to say goodbye to 2009 and leave it behind forever. Much the same can be said about the end of the decade as well. *Time* magazine even described the 2000s as “the decade from hell”. It started out with Y2K and 9/11 and ends with financially tough times, 10% unemployment, terror threats, and war in old and possibly new fields. It's been a rough time for our country, for individuals, and even for the Christian church, which continues to undergo the growing attacks of Satan, while the love of many grow cold. Many would answer that question, “Are you ready for a new year?” with a resounding, “Yes!” in the hope that 2010 and the decade that follows will somehow be better...but will it?

Not everything in the past year or the past decade was sorrow and tribulation however. In many ways and in many places, things may not look so good, but the Lord has still blessed the past year and past decade with his grace. He has still blessed our nation with relative peace at home and riches beyond counting. He has still blessed us individually by continuing or even starting our time of grace here in this life. For many of us, our marital or family situation is very different than it was one or ten years ago. There have been sorrows and troubles and difficulties, but also plenty of grace as families started or grew or changed with God's hand of blessing, even if we didn't see it at the time. Whether the Lord was taking a loved one home or providing a new gift of grace into our lives, in every way he blessed us.

In the past decade, here in our congregation, the Lord saw fit to open his hand of blessing taking us from the smallest size to the largest in our congregation's history, not necessarily impressive by the world's standards, but God's grace nonetheless. He has given us more opportunities as individuals, as a congregation, and as a church body to share his Good News than we ever imagined before. We, as individuals, as couples, as families, as a congregation have changed through times of sorrow and times of joy in the past year and decade, yet through it all our Lord and Savior never changed, nor did he ever change the ways he comes to us through his Word and his Holy Sacraments. As we look ahead to a new year and decade, none of us knows what's coming, how our lives and world will change or stay the same or even if the Lord will give us the year and decade before us. So **ARE YOU READY FOR A NEW YEAR?**

When you take a look at Jesus' words in Luke 12, you might wonder if we're back in Advent or the season of End Time. Oh, these verses are loaded with encouragement to **“be ready”**, but for what does Jesus want us to **“be ready”**? The Lord tells us, **“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet... You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”** At first, you might wonder, “Pastor, haven't we spent weeks talking about this already? What does this have to do with being ready for a new year?”

The truth is, the end of another calendar year, the end of a decade is a time when people are most often thinking about the end of time. When the clock strikes midnight tonight, a certain period of time will end and a new period of time will begin. Perhaps you're old enough to recall all the hubbub and excitement and concern and hoopla that went along with the end of the year 1999 and the beginning of the year 2000. It not only was a new year and a new decade, but a new century and new millennium. Many were quite fearful of what was going to happen at the stroke of twelve as the year 2000 began. No one knew what would happen. Thankfully, nothing did.

The end of a year is a good time for you and me to see how really ready we are for THE end of time. Jesus uses a picture that would've been familiar to his disciples. The kind of readiness he wants in his followers is like that of faithful servants watching for a master away at a wedding banquet. They're ready to serve with their lamps still burning even at the latest hours of the night. They wouldn't know when he would return since wedding banquets back then could last for days, so they had to be ready and there would be blessing for those who remained ready. **“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night** (basically the middle of the night).”

As we get ready for a new year and a new decade, are we that ready? Are we faithfully watching and waiting for what the Lord has in store for us, preparing ourselves for each new day of grace with repentance and longing for the Master's return? Or have you and I grown faithfully complacent and lazy and unprepared, spiritually sleeping on the job and longing for what we plan to do tomorrow, next week, next month, or next

year? I'm sure if you and I were to look back on the past year or past ten years, we would see how unprepared we were when life didn't go the way we expected or the Lord allowed the heavy burden of a cross or trouble or grief or sorrow to come into our lives. We would see how spiritually complacent we were when the Lord required active readiness. We would see how we have so often taken on a here-and-now what-I-want-when-I-want-it view of each day and month and year, as opposed to a view of each year, each day, each breath as a gift of God's grace and an opportunity to get ready to see him. How often haven't you and I been caught unprepared when tragedy strikes, bad news comes into our homes, or change comes in a way we don't anticipate? How often haven't you and I been like the owner of a home who was unprepared when a thief broke into it? So **are you really ready for a new year** with nothing, but the unknown before you? If we are to be honest with ourselves, you and I need to confess, "No, Lord, I'm not ready."

Thankfully, the sermon doesn't end there. Our time of grace has not yet ended. We are still breathing. The old year has not yet passed away. Christ is still on the way. Jesus spoke these words when he was getting ready to give his life for the sins of all. His disciples, though often warned, proved to be woefully unprepared, but still Jesus urged and encouraged his disciples to **"be ready"** even though he knew they would fail him. Why? The Master loves his servants. The Lord cares for his people and wants them to be ready for when he comes back. Jesus explained, **"You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."**

Jesus wanted his disciples and he wants us to be ready because he loves us and wants us to be with him in heaven forever. In fact, that love was so great that it brought him from heaven to earth as an infant lowly to put himself in your place. It brought him to suffering and the cross to pay with his own life for those times when you have been woefully unprepared for what the Lord has allowed into your life. It brought him to the grave you deserve for your sins and it brought him out of the grave to guarantee your forgiveness, life, and salvation. That love took that good news and spread it to every land and every tongue and every generation down to our own, year after year, decade after decade, century after century until it reached you. That love spoke to you through the very words of God and brought you from death to life through the waters of Holy Baptism. That love still comes to you through the Word and as Christ gives himself to you with bread and wine in his Holy Supper. That love has kept the Savior by your side through the good times and the bad, the sad times and the times of unbridled joy, the times of guilt and grief and times of forgiveness and blessedness. That love of Christ through his Word and through his Sacraments prepares you for a new year, a new decade, a new life with him forever. That love of Christ readies you for the unknown, for the time he has given you whether much or little, for the crosses and the victories, for the ups and down of life that lay before you.

So are you ready? The old year is passing away. By God's grace, a new year and a new decade will dawn in just a few hours. More grace. Through it all, your unchanging Savior and his unchanging love will be there with you and for you every step of the way, even to the Last Day when he will come to bring you home. By God's grace and with his help, you're ready. Amen.