

Dear watchful servants at Bethlehem Lutheran, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Things change in an instant. One minute you're enjoying an afternoon with the family, the next there is bickering and resentment. One minute you are at work or in school like any other day, the next tragedy strikes and it is a day of history. In a few hours, the year will change from 2010 to 2011 in a matter of seconds and in some parts of the world the calendar has already changed.

Some changes occur in an instant, without notice. And others occur with great eagerness and anticipation. With the coming New Year, many people anticipate many changes. We worry about how the economy will be in 2011. We make resolutions that this is the year we will be content with the blessings God has given us. This is the year I will joyfully give back my first fruits. This is the year I will volunteer. This year, I will be ready and more energetically keep my lamp burning, as I boldly proclaim Christ to the world. This is the year I will do all the things I am supposed to and I will be ready when the Lord comes.

As we look to the upcoming New Year, we sometimes feel as if we get a clean slate, a chance to start over. But why do we need this? If we look back on this past year we see that we had such high and lofty goals, much like those set this year. But in an instant, we fail at these things. Money and struggling economy may constantly bear on our minds, as we doubt that the Lord will continue to provide for our needs. Abuse of the name of Jesus Christ will occur at work and school and we may not defend our Lord as he is ridiculed for fear of being ridiculed ourselves. Receiving Christ's gifts in Word and Sacrament may be pushed aside for a few extra hours of sleep or for social activities. We will not love our neighbors as ourselves. By the end of January 1<sup>st</sup>, we will have all sinned.

In short, we will not be ready and our lamps will have been stunted by our sin. If our Lord knocked on our door, would we be ready to open that door to him, or has the robber already come and plundered the Lord's house while we slept? Satan, that thief and liar, does not come to steal your cherished car, nor your cherished instruments, nor your new Wii or X-box, or any of your possessions. He has no use for such things. Satan comes not to steal your possessions; he comes to steal you from the Lord. He comes accusing us of our sin, showing us that we are not worthy to be in God's presence, trying to condemn us to eternal punishment along with himself.

"Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised - who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." But this doesn't mean that Satan can't and won't tempt us. Satan will try and sneak into the house of the Lord and will try and pry you away. He will attempt to break apart this household of faith

and cause bickering and resentment toward one another. He will attempt to make us doubt Christ's forgiveness, that it is even here given to you, or that he will even come again.

Satan wants to be the one condemning us, so that at the hour we do not suppose, when the Son of Man returns, we will not be ready. On our own, Satan would be right - our lamps would be out, we would not be ready. But the love of Christ keeps us with him, He is the one who died for you, He is the one who keeps you from the evil one. He dresses you for action, clothing you in his righteousness, so that you can have new life. He keeps our lamps burning, so that we are ready for His return.

We may feel the burden of our sin, and see the light of your lamps stunted. But, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Shall ridicule from the world, a struggling economy, or personal struggles? "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." None of these things will be able to "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." He sees Satan tempting us, sees our struggle with sin, he sees the light of our lamps stunted as we await his coming, and he comes to keep your lamps burning. And the Lord comes not to be served, but He has dressed himself to serve. He has put on a servant's clothes, the flesh of our humanity. He will cause us to recline at the table. He will feed us. For us, when we are found waiting and ready, awake and prepared, the Lord reclines us at His table and prepares the feast of Himself, given for you.

In an instant, we fell into Satan's trap and into sin. In an instant we deserved nothing but death. In a minute of our fall, God promised a Savior. A day like any other, and suddenly the birth of a baby in Bethlehem changed how the day would be celebrated. A Friday like any other, and the skies turned black, the Temple curtain was torn in two, and our Lord cried out, "It is finished," and death was conquered. A day like any other and Christ was raised, conquering death. A day like any other, and you were baptized into his death, being dressed for action and your lamp being lit. We will have many hopes for a clean slate in the New Year, with many expectations. Christ has already given you new life, and He promises to keep you clothed and your lamps burning so at that hour you do not suppose, when the Son of Man is coming, you will be ready.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.