

There are certain professions which require you to stay up all night: a security guard working the night watch or a nurse working the night shift in the ER. There are certain jobs that require you to stay up all night. In the Gospel for today, Jesus tells us to be watchful for his return. So the theme of our sermon today is:

Watch for the Lord's Return

- I. Because the Father has given you the kingdom.**
- II. Because Jesus promises us great reward.**

First, watch for the Lord's return because the Father has given you the kingdom. The Gospel for today begins, **"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).** God likes, it is his pleasure, to give his greatest treasure to those who are little and insignificant in the eyes of the world. Back in Luke chapter 10 it says, **"At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.'" (Luke 10:21)** God likes, it is his pleasure, to give his greatest treasure to those who are small and insignificant in the eyes of the world. And we see that again in the Gospel for today. God's kingdom is the greatest treasure there is, and God is pleased to give his greatest treasure to the little flock. In many ways we Christians are a little flock. We are sinful. We are frail and vulnerable in many ways. But out of pure grace, God has seen fit to give us the kingdom.

Since God has given us his greatest treasure, the kingdom, that has a huge effect on the way we view our earthly possessions. Jesus says, **"Sell your possessions and give to the poor." (Luke 11:33a)** In the book of Acts, Luke tells us about Christians selling some of their possessions and giving the money to the poor. It says in Acts 2:45, **"They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need."** They were under no obligation to do this. They did this out of thankfulness and out of their own free will. In Acts chapter 5, there's a story which illustrates that the Christians were under no obligation to do sell their property. There was a couple named Ananias and Sapphira. And they sold some property and they said they were giving all of the proceeds to the apostles but they were lying, they had kept back some of it for themselves. And the problem wasn't that they kept back some of it for themselves. The problem was that they lied about it. Peter said to Ananias, **"Didn't the property belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal" (Acts 5:4a).**

God has made us stewards or managers of the money he has given us. And there are four main things God wants us to do with the money he has given us. He wants us to take care of our own needs, he wants us to take care of the needs of our immediate family, he wants us to support the work of the church, and he wants us to give to those in need. Here Jesus focuses on giving to those in need. **"Sell your possessions and give to the poor" (Luke 12:33a).** God has made you the steward of the possessions he has given you. And so God wants you to ask yourself, "How can I best use the resources he has given me to help my fellow human beings in their need?" Are there things that I could sell out of thankfulness and free will and give the proceeds to a charity? Could I set aside a portion of my income to give to a charity like WELS Christian Aid and Relief?

Charitable giving has many benefits. The first benefit is that we help our neighbor in his need. Another benefit is that charitable giving helps us to be detached from our earthly possessions and keep the focus on our treasure in heaven. If we get too attached to our earthly possessions, then we are not being watchful for our Lord to come. Part of being watchful for Christ's return is not letting our earthly possessions distract us from our true treasure. We Christians should feel a certain detachment from our earthly possessions, so that we are ready to leave and part with them at any time. The Apostle Paul once said in 1 Corinthians 7, **"What I mean brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on ... those who buy something (should live as if) it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of this world, as if not engrossed in them. For the world in its present form is passing away" (1 Cor 7:29, 30-31).** We can feel a certain detachment from our earthly

possessions because know that our true treasure is in heaven. Jesus said, **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** (Luke 6:34) God has given us the kingdom and so we should stay watchful by keeping our focus on that. Watch for the Lord’s return because the Father has given you the kingdom. And, secondly, watch for the Lord’s return because Jesus promises great reward.

Jesus tells a parable which illustrates the lavish grace that he will show us if we are watchful for his return. He says, **“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet”** (Luke 12:35-36). The servants do not know what time the master is going to return from the wedding banquet. It might be very late at night. But the servants want to be ready to serve the master as soon as he gets home. These servants were **“dressed ready for service and they had their lamps burning”** (Luke 12:35). They stayed up late so that as soon as the master came home, they could immediately open the door for him and serve him. Jesus says, **“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him”** (Luke 12:35-36). Jesus says that the master will be so happy that the servants were watching for him that the master will serve the servants! He says, **“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them”** (Luke 12:35-37). The master has the servants sit down at the dinner table and serves them! One Lutheran commentator said, **“The reward for vigilance is astonishingly great – the returning master will serve the servants!”**¹ Jesus is the Lord of all the universe, but he is going to serve us at the banquet in heaven! Can you imagine that! This is certainly not something that we deserve. This is pure grace. About five chapters later in Luke chapter 17, Jesus tells us, **“So also you, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty’”** (Luke 17:10). This is not something we deserve, but it certainly a reason for us to stay watchful for our Lord to come!

Jesus warns us to stay watchful, because we do not know when he will return. He says, **“But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him”** (Luke 12:39-40). We do not know when Christ will return, so we have to stay watchful.

What does it mean to stay watchful? Simply put, we stay watchful by believing the Gospel.² We stay watchful by believing in Jesus as our Savior from sin. We stay watchful by making sure our faith stays strong. We make sure that our earthly possessions do not absorb us and distract us from our heavenly treasure. We make sure our faith stays strong by regular contact with God’s Word. Jesus said, **“Keep your lamps burning”** (Luke 12:35). Let’s keep our lamps burning by being in regular contact with God’s Word and Sacrament. We are watchful when we feed our faith by hearing the Good News that Jesus died for each and every one of our sins. The master served his servants by laying down his life for us. We’re a little flock here on earth. We need to keep hearing that we don’t need to be afraid because the Father has been pleased to give us the kingdom. Be watchful for our Lord’s return by continuing to hear and believe the Gospel. Be watchful for the Lord’s return, because the Father has given you the kingdom and because Jesus promises us great reward. Amen.

¹ Martin Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary, New Testament* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1971), p. 71.

² See the book by Thomas P. Nass, *End Times: Jesus is Coming Soon* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2011), 217-237.