

Eve of the Name of Jesus – December 31, 2015

Text: Luke 12:35-40

Theme: "It is Imperative!"

An imperative is a direct order. It is not "Let us," or "we ought" or "we should." It is "you do this!" Jesus said "Stay dressed for action!" "Keep your lamps burning!" Jesus does not mince words. He is quite specific as we enter this new year that we have a job to do and he fully expects us to do it.

Sometimes we would rather have a nicer Jesus. You know, a Jesus who would say, "Hey, if you feel like giving more money to the church; that would be really nice." Or, "If you don't mind and have the time, worshipping me would be great." That is what the Pharisees wanted too. They did not care for this imperative Jesus who was always going around and giving orders. Do this! Don't do that! Sometimes we would like a nicer pastor as well. Sometimes we like a pastor who never sends us difficult letters or preaches challenging sermons. Just tell us that we are all doing great and if we just do the best we can, that's just fine with God. But the pastor stands in the stead of and by the command of Jesus so a demanding, imperative Jesus requires a demanding, imperative pastor. That's why some congregations are always getting rid of their pastors, they keep hoping they will find a nice one. Sadly, when they finally find a nice one, they eventually realize that he is not challenging them to grow because he is not standing in the stead of and by the command of Jesus. It is a catch-22.

As he ascended into heaven, Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations. Again, an imperative. He did not say we could if we wanted. He said do it! Baptize your children and teach them everything he has commanded by getting them to church and Sunday school. Talk to your neighbors and invite them to church and Bible class. Never give up on praying for and talking to the unbelievers in your life because you never know when the Holy Spirit might choose to act.

The good news is that Jesus does not leave us to do it on our own. He knows that it would never get done. He left behind for us his word and his sacraments to empower us to do the work he commanded us to do and to empower the people we are called to reach. So that's why we gather here tonight; to fuel up before going out and striving in a new year to do everything we could not get to last year.

Tonight we are dressed for battle. We do not wear armor but rather Baptismal water. We know the plan from his word and our lamps will be all fueled up with his body and blood. With that we strike out again proclaiming what our Lord has done for us and scattering the seeds of the Gospel knowing that some will fall on hard ground, some will be choked by the cares of this world and some will be scorched by the difficulties of this life, but some...some will take root and grow bearing a harvest. That is what we do. That is what we live for. Parents of young children are the first line of offense teaching their children about the Lord and bringing them here to worship and learn. The rest of us are the second line encouraging children and grandchildren, challenging weak believers to grow and instructing unbelievers, never giving in and never giving up. It is imperative that we do this work while it is still light because once the master returns, it is all over. For any who have never received faith and for those who have lost faith, they have no hope of eternal paradise. The task is that important. That is why it is not optional but imperative.