

Watch and Work! Your Loving Lord is Coming.

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Agree or disagree? Being a Christians means you'll be doing work... hard work... and lots of it. (Think about it a bit.)

As a good Lutheran, is your first inclination to want to disagree with that statement? After all, we're not saved by works, right? We know perfectly well no amount of good works will elevate us to a position of acceptance and worthiness before the Lord. No matter how hard we try, we're not going to be perfect, are we? If you're not sure, try being perfect for just one day and let me know how it goes.

We know we're saved by God's grace through the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus Christ, right? So listen to the statement once again. Being a Christians means you'll be doing work... hard work... and lots of it. Do you disagree? Apparently 85% of church goers do disagree, because statistics show that in most churches 15% of the membership does 85% of the work. Do the 85% who aren't working hard have it right? Listen once again to our sermon text in Mark 13:32-37:

" "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!' "" (Mark 13:32-37, NIV)

The truth is, though, that God would want us to agree with that statement. Being a Christian *does* mean that we'll be doing work... hard work... and lots of it. Let's take a look at the text closer to better understand what this means.

But first, Jesus wants us to understand very clearly a particular point: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem. Jesus death was drawing near. While walking around, the disciples marveled at the beauty of the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus the told them something startling. Before long, that temple would be completely destroyed. No stone would be left on another. Jerusalem, the holy city, would be destroyed. It would fall under God's judgment. This happened, just as Jesus said it would, about 40 years after his ascension into heaven.

But Jesus used this situation to also talk about the world's destruction and God's final judgment on all mankind. And the disciples wanted to know then just as most people want to know now, *When is this all going to happen?!* The field of study about Judgment day... what will happen and when... is called "eschatology." Literally, it means "last things." There is no end to curiosity about the end times, is there? Go to a Christian book store and typically the largest section of the store will be dedicated to eschatology... last things.

But Jesus tells us not to believe them. No one will know when. In fact, Jesus even says, “not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,” meaning Jesus himself. According to his human nature, Jesus did not know the day or the hour when he would return to earth to judge all people. That knowledge was something he “set aside” when he came to earth and took on our human nature. End-time writers who give you a timetable of events and who try to pin down a date, as some have, didn’t get that from our Lord. We simply don’t know when Jesus is going to return.

So exactly when is not something God wants us to concern ourselves with. So that means we shouldn’t give Judgment Day a second thought, right? We should never think about it since don’t know when it’s coming? Wrong! Our text says: “Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.” Not only are we supposed to think about it, but there is an urgency conveyed here, isn’t there? When a fencer shouts, “On guard!” that means you better wake up and get ready to have a sword poking in your direction. If you hear a golfer yell, “Fore!” you better immediately look up and see if there’s a diveted, white projectile heading your way. When Jesus says, “Be on your guard! Be alert!” he means we better not get distracted and it’s time to watch carefully and pay attention. It’s urgent! To let our guard down would be dangerous.

Jesus helps us understand this with a story. A man who has to go to a country a long ways away leaves his servants in charge of his house. Jesus is the “man,” of course, the church is the “house” and we believers are the “servants.” The first point Jesus makes with this picture is that we in the church are to “Be alert,” as he says—we are to be looking for his return at any moment. We don’t know when, but we do know he *will* return.

Doesn’t this fact dramatically change the way we live our lives? Jesus *is* coming... so what are you going to do today? Tomorrow? This week? This month? In our bulletins today, there is a prayer request. In Lincoln, we have a sister church, St. Marks. It also has a grade school like ours. Just a couple weeks ago, Jill, the wife of the principal of that school, fainted. She was taken to the hospital and released. The next day she fainted again and went back to the hospital. A few hours later was having brain surgery. A very fast growing cancer was discovered and it was the size of tangerine. Ten days later, she had a second surgery... that same tumor had grown back significantly in that short amount of time. How much time does Jill left in this world? Only God knows.

Friends, that is the point Jesus wants us to take seriously. How much time do you have left? Truly, God only knows. Maybe every last one of us only has a month left because that’s when Jesus will return. Maybe one or more of us won’t be here in a month. What if you knew for sure a month was it? *What would you do?* Would you spend your time a little differently than you do now? Would you spend as much time in front of the TV? Would you go shopping and buy lots of stuff? Would you be talking with our family more? Would you read the Bible more? Would we make an extra effort to lovingly warn everyone we know who doesn’t currently trust in Jesus, or who has drifted? Would your priorities be different if you know a month was all that was left?

Jesus would be pleased if we took time now to reassess our priorities. What would Jesus have us do? Listen to what he says. Again, speaking in a story he says, “It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.” We mentioned before who the different people are in this

picture: Jesus being the man who goes to a far country, which is a reference to his return to heaven; and we Christians being the servants who are left in charge of the church in his absence. The Savior has entrusted us with the work of his church. Isn't that amazing? Christ loved the church so much he gave himself for her. He is so attached to his church that the Bible describes him as the head, and the church as his body. He has entrusted his body, the church, to you and me until the day he returns.

And what are we to do? Jesus has given to each of us "his assigned task." Each one of us, every believer, has some responsibility the Lord has entrusted to him or her. The body of Christ is not my sole responsibility... nor the responsibility of the all pastors and church leaders... the body of Christ, it's maintenance, it's growth... is entrusted to the servants... to all believers... to each and every one of you!

Back to the question I asked at the beginning: **Agree or disagree? Being a Christians means you'll be doing work... hard work... and lots of it.** Are you ready to change your answer yet? Jesus has given you – each and every one of you – important work to do. He has entrusted you with things of eternal importance. The Lord of the church has given "*each his assigned task*." "Each" is at the start of the phrase, the position of emphasis or importance. "To each his work (he gave)," our Lord's words literally read. Our Lord gave a special task to you and you and you and you, and we can go up and down the rows here, pointing to everyone here. Our God has graciously taken us humble jars of clay and turned us into his sacred vessels by the cleansing blood of his Son. His redeeming love has raised each of us up from being unworthy sinners to being the Lord's own coworkers, entrusted with the most important work there is to do on earth. Each of us has been given some special work to do for the Lord.

Friends, this is an urgent matter. Do you and I need to think about the work the Lord has given us more in these last days? Do we need to remind one another that our Lord has given each of us some work to do? And do we need to help each other see what our particular work might be? We do, don't we? In the coming month or two, we are going to be asking each member to actively participate in the work of Christ's church. Our church has recently reorganized so we can help each other see and do the work God has given us. God has entrusted to you time, unique abilities, a certain amount of earthly possessions... and he want you to be doing work... hard work... lots of work. Not to earn his favor and work ourselves into his good graces. No, we all know we already enjoy his love and unconditional acceptance. The blood of Jesus covers our wrongs. We're not working to become God's children. We already are in Christ. We're not working to earn eternal life. It's already ours as a gift. We're not working to make up for our guilt. It's already gone, and we've already been declared innocent for Jesus sake. No, we commit ourselves to giving our time, our unique abilities and our earthly possessions to doing the work God has given us, because we are so thankful and our hearts so warmed and overjoyed at his goodness.

"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. When I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" Friends, let us all hear our Savior's wake-up call today. We have so many opportunities, so many resources, so many unique abilities... and all of this belongs to God and is entrusted to us. Let's

rededicate ourselves to using all he has given us to the honor and glory of his name. Ask yourself daily, “How can I best use my time for God today... my unique abilities... my earthly possessions.” Immerse yourself anew in God’s love and promises by reading Scripture daily. Speak to the Lord regularly in prayer. Bask in the warmth of his love and mercy, and see if his love doesn’t compel you to do more work as you become more watchful for the joyful day of Christ’s return. Amen.