

Ezekiel 33: Watchman

In Ezekiel today the Lord reminds him that he is to be a watchman. And we understand also that as holders of the Word of God, the Bible, the Church is to carry on this role, Pastors in particular, of being watchmen. To let the people know that something is coming, to warn them. And as uncomfortable as that can be, it is a vitally important job. Because then you can seek shelter.

I don't like tornadoes, never have since I watched the movie "Twister" as a kid so long ago. "Thank you, Lord, I don't live on the plains," I probably said. Then, many years later, my first call was to South Dakota – the plains. Each summer storm that had any teeth sent me to my television, watching the radar. "Is it a tornado warning or watch? Which is which?"

And I wondered, "What did the people do before the television doplar scans?"

What did they do before the text messages and the sirens? What did they do without a *warning*? In a pitch black night you can't see if there is a tornado in that storm or where it is heading. So what did you do? Did you whisk your family off to the cellar at every storm? I doubt it. Or did you just hope it didn't hit your house that night? Either way, I was thankful for the warnings.

Most people are. This is why every army, every fortress and city, had watchmen. It was terribly boring work. You stood there pacing in the cold, your back hurt, you

were struggling to stay awake, jealous that you got watch duty in the early night while your comrades were warm and playing dice. And in the same way our seismology, tornado, and tsunami warnings sit idly by most of the time, not doing much. Until danger draws near. And then suddenly there is no job so important as the watchman. There is no one more heroic than the watchmen. When the army is gathering on the horizon, when evil is on the way, the Watchman had a job to do. To warn the people so that they might prepare for whatever was coming. Lives hang in the balance.

And it was the same for Ezekiel and is the same for us today. Lives hang in the balance! So many are wandering outside the city walls unprepared for what is coming! For some, life is going fine they are healthy and happy and unprepared for the day of trouble, unaware of where to find hope, forgiveness, and life. And they are like naïve folks who see no need of a watchmen, and live outside the range of his trumpet and bell. They will be the first to fall and be plundered.

Though with the way the world is today many, I suspect, are beginning to see that this world is broken and dangerous. And that is a good and true realization, but the next step is to consider where one might find shelter and protection. So where do they look for help? In money, fame, medicine, government, masks? Those are certainly helpful in a sense, don't get me wrong. But none of them give salvation. And so as a tornado twists towards them they hide in tents, not cellars. Many put

their trust in their own ability, intellect, good works, or devotion. So as an army marches toward them they gather to fight with sticks, not swords.

And so yes, it is our job, to call out to others to warn them of the dangers of this world. But it is also our job to tell them they can seek refuge in the mighty fortress of our God's salvation. It is our job to call out that the sin, the fear, the death, the depression - we can't beat it. But we know the One who can!

And we who are on the rock, who flee to the fortress of our God and his mighty salvation, what joy and comfort is ours! But let us not pretend we now no longer need to spare a thought for the siege. No, how can we prepare our hearts and minds for when danger comes - for when the bad news from the doctor comes, for when the heartbreak comes, for when the day of trouble comes near? Let us also heed the trumpet call of the Word of God.

Let us be wary of the dangers on the horizon. The degradation of the family, the alarmingly rapid increase of biblical illiteracy, the nihilism and apathy which yields to depression, pandemics, violence, riots, persecution, and the coming final judgment. Yes, we all draw near to that day.

Look out! It's out there. Or are our families without struggle? Do our children know who Goliath is? Let alone the God who used David to slay him, let alone the

God who came, the Son of David, to slay even greater giants? Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, the valley of the shadow of death looms over us.

But so many don't want to hear it. "How dare you tell me there is right and wrong!? So insensitive, so intolerant!" "How dare you say the path I am walking leads to hardship and brokenness!?" "How dare you tell me that what I think is wrong!?" And the watchmen, with no easy job, remember, is reviled, when he is only trying to help. And lest we think ourselves immune, ask yourself this – when was the last time God's Word convicted you? What is the sin you struggle with that the Lord's Word condemns? If you can't think of anything... maybe you should listen a little harder, because you may be stopping your ears to the watchman's trumpet. A watchman that has nothing to tell you is not being honest with you or the Word of God which, it's law, convicts us and shows our need, like that of a needy child in our Gospel lesson, for refuge.

How easy it would be to not have to say anything controversial!? How great this job would be if I didn't have to worry about sin, "It's OK, God doesn't care, do whatever you want!" People would love me, there would be no awkwardness, until the dangers on the horizon come near bringing heartache, disease, and brokenness. Oh, it would be easier for me, but then I also wouldn't be a watchman. I'd be a shill, a preacher to itching ears, a charlatan ignorant of the judgment I'd be bearing

upon myself as one who has to give an account to the King, and trust me there is enough on my conscience already without more blood of God's people.

So let us listen to the Word of God and let it convict us, let it conform us. So when it calls us to fight, we fight, when it tells us to forgive, we forgive, when it tells us to submit, we submit – “even to those fools in the government?” If it isn't sinful? We heard Paul's words today: Yes. Might not be fun. Or do we only have ears for the warnings we like from the watchmen? If we pick and choose which texts convict us, or pick and choose which call of the watchman to listen to, how are we different? So let us hearken to the call of the Word of God, and in every time of doubt, uncertainty, pride, fear, darkness run to the shelter of the King.

Because not all His Words are a warning. That's only one step. The watchman calls out, but the watchman isn't the Savior. No, the watchman points the people unto the Savior, the King. The King is the One who fights, guards, and delivers his people. He is the One who rode towards betrayal, death, corrupt officials, and shed his blood that we might be cleansed - cleansed of our sin that seeks, like the disciples, to be the greatest, cleansed of our sin that thinks “those people need to listen to the watchmen, but not me!” Cleansed of our sin that seeks shelter and hope in places other than the King. He washes it all away. So the arrows of judgment and of the evil foe – not a single one will strike us! He took them all. There are no millstones for God's people in Christ Jesus. For he was taken it all

upon himself and risen victorious, overcoming it all, to take his throne and crown forever.

Which means it doesn't particularly matter what danger is on the horizon: tornados, sins, depression, pandemics, cancer, the death we draw closer to? The King beats them all. He is the unshakeable one, the champion, the uncreated, the creator. Will his shield splinter? Will his sword be stopped? Will his feet stumble? Will his Word of forgiveness and Salvation he has spoken to You and has been washed over you, be contradicted? By no means. Stand behind him and fear no foe. For each day, yes we draw closer to hardship, but in Christ, each day we draw closer to redemption and renewal. God be praised.