

## Is that our problem?

Ezekiel 33:7-11

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day AMEN.

“So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel!”. This is written in our first lesson today by the prophet Ezekiel. It is a hard lesson to hear, because it is full of warnings and condemnation. Ezekiel chapter 33 talks about personal responsibility and brings a word of judgment down on the hearer of those words. Well today you were the hearers of those words. Did they make you feel uncomfortable, anxious, worried? The passage is basically saying you are a sentinel for God’s people, and if you don’t do your job that God has given you to do, then the blood of the innocent will be on your heads. These are tough texts to read and talk about, because it points the finger directly at us, and asks us what we are doing.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, once preached on this very text while a professor at Wittenberg Seminary. Now he was preaching to other clergy, monks, and students, but the words of that sermon still hold true for us 500 years later. Listen to how he talked about this passage from Ezekiel:

Luther said: “I know very well that you don’t like to hear this and that I am annoying many of you; nevertheless, I shall say it. I will also advise you, no matter who you are: If you have preaching in mind or are able to help it along, then do not become a priest or a monk, for there is a passage in the thirty-third and thirty-fourth chapters of the prophet Ezekiel, unfortunately a terrifying passage, which reads: if you forsake your neighbor, see him going astray, and so do not help him, do not preach to him, I will call you to account for his soul. This is a passage which is not often read. But I say, you become a priest or a monk in order to pray your seven canonical hours and say mass, and you think you want to be godly. Alas, you’re a fine fellow! It will fail you. You say the Psalter, you pray the rosary, you pray all kinds of other prayers, and say a lot of words; you say mass, you kneel before the altar, you read confession, you go on mumbling and maundering, and all the while you think you are free from sin. And yet in your heart you have such great envy that, if you could choke your neighbor and get away with it creditably, you would do it; and that’s the way you say mass. It would be no wonder if a thunderbolt struck you to the ground.”

Powerful accusations Luther is leveling at the hearers of his sermon at Wittenberg, you hearers if you think your holy, you do all the holy stuff and yet you don’t care for your neighbor that has gone astray you are condemned. These are the same powerful accusations recorded in Ezekiel to the people of that day, you are a sentinel if you don’t

call out a warning when the enemy is coming then the innocent's blood will be on your hands and you are condemned. And these are the same powerful words of accusations that are being leveled at us today, we are the Christian sentinels, if we don't stand and do what God has called us to do we are most to be pitied.

But these words of condemnation are opposite what we usually like to hear. I have been taught over and over again about God's grace. I have taught this and preached it. The teachers that have just be installed teach this in Sunday school, in Bible Studies. We hear this in our songs and in our prayers and in confession. The motto of the Lutheran reformation after all is that we are justified by grace through faith. We hear that we are given the gracious gift of Jesus Christ our Savior, and through his sacrifice we are assured of a freedom in the everlasting kingdom. That is what much of our entire faith is built upon. We believe in this assurance and promise that is guaranteed through the grace of God and the saving act of Jesus Christ.

But today, we hear another message in that text, another understanding that Luther called the Terrifying Passage. I am made a sentinel. You are made a sentinel, or the better translation to describe it would be that we are made watchers. Watchers for the world. A Great responsibility has been placed on our shoulders as Christians. We are given the burden of knowing the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. That's right the gospel can even be a burden, a gift that weighs us down with a responsibility of doing something with that good news. In our baptisms we are made a child of God, and at the same time are made servants of God, witnesses of the good news and ministers of the faith in which we believe.

God has made us watchers on guard for the world. We are told to stand at the gates, on the wall and spread the news that God has given us. We are to share everything about our faith, about our God, about the message that we have been taught, the creeds we say we believe, the promise of life even over death in the love of Jesus Christ. We are to call to a world that needs to hear of this hope, that needs to know God's justice, to feel that freedom, to know that respect, to be in that peace.

Yes, it is not easy to do this. To stand up and be the first one to make a pronouncement of faith is a scary thing. As Luther had pointed out, to sit in this building and pray the prayers, come to the altar, to take communion, to socialize with friends and do all the churchly things is much easier then actually preaching the to the world the promise of the Lord. But none the less each one of us by being a believer are commissioned to be preachers of God's word. To stand on that wall and see the troubles, the pains, the ills, the

corruption, the abuse, the greed, the hatred, the social failings and evils of this world and not say anything or do anything places the blame squarely on us. The Word of God, the Love of Christ, the peace and grace that is given to us by the Lord is something we can not keep to ourselves, it charges us to share it with others. That is our responsibility. We are the watchers of the world, not to be silent and stand alone on a tower, but to call out the word of God in love, honor, and respect.

This is our mission as a people of God we are to give as God has already given. To proclaim as God has proclaimed. To love as God has loved. To care for the sick, the hurt, the forgotten. To help overcome injustices. To worship rightly and teach others to worship and pray. To share the faith with all that we can in any means that we can.

Do we have a choice in this obligation? Yes, the text clearly states that we can decide to ignore the words of the warning and not reach out to tell others, to invite, to care, to love. But, then we also risk the judgment that will come and try to explain why we didn't do anything with the many blessings that were given to us. But there is that other choice that God asks of the watcher, to do their job and call out the warning, the news, the good news and bad; to raise the alarm about the Gospel message. We are given the choice to become the Christian Watchers and stand outside these walls as Christians proclaiming the love of God. The world has problems. This creation is fallen and suffering in many places. The world's problems are our problems, since we know the one who offers us eternal life. We can not stand by as a church and watch and be quiet to the rest of the world. It is time to call out, to proclaim, to shout the message of God from the roof tops. There are many issues that we face right here in Hanover that we need to address. There are many needs in this community that need to be overcome. God has called us to stand in those places and act, to proclaim, to tell and share the message of God. May you be Watchers of God, witness of the Glory of God, and servants of God's people in all that you do. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.  
AMEN.