

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Lent 3
Saturday, March 19, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, March 20, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.

“The Watchman’s Job is to Warn, not to Judge”

Ezekiel 33:7-20

In our Wednesday Bible Class two weeks ago, we were discussing pastoral authority and I brought up this passage from Ezekiel which is our Old Testament reading today. We are studying the 4th Commandment right now, as we are working our way through the six chief parts of Christian doctrine which is the structure with which Luther organized the Small and Large Catechisms.

The six chief parts are the 10 Commandments, the Apostle’s Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, the Office of the Keys and Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar.

As we are studying the 4th Commandment, we had spent a couple of weeks talking about living under the authority of others (authorities in the family, where we work, within the realm of the civil state) and the responsibility we have in recognizing that authority. We have discussed the nature of authority and the burden of exercising that responsibility in a way that is beneficial to those under your authority and beneficial to those whose authority you are under. We all have authority given to us in our various vocations in life – unless you are an infant and then you are probably not really understanding anything I am saying.

I have responsibilities as a father; I have responsibilities as a son. Over the years, those responsibilities have been ever changing.

A week ago Wednesday our conversation moved away from dealing with authority in the civil realm and family dynamics, and we looked at authority within the church. As a man who has been given authority, I have responsibilities as a pastor, as the shepherd of this congregation. I have responsibilities as someone who is under the authority of the Central Illinois District, the LCMS, and ultimately as one who serves as an under-shepherd to Christ the Good Shepherd. And like all of our pastors, I have taken vows to perform the duties of my office and to uphold the true teachings of Scripture. The Word of God has authority.

Since a week ago Wednesday, I have been thinking a lot about what it means to be a watchman. I was very thankful on Monday morning when I started my sermon prep and saw that this was one of the readings.

When I hear the term “watchman,” I immediately am drawn to the words of the hymn “Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying” – which we will sing at the end of the service. The third verse begins, “If you cannot be a watchman, Standing high on Zion’s wall, Pointing out the path to heaven, Offering life and peace to all . . .”

The job of a watchman is for the purpose of calling out to the community under his authority the news which preserves life and peace. Historically, the watchman standing guard on the highest wall or tallest tower of the castle would cry out, “One o’clock and all is well!” Those are comforting words. Life and peace are being preserved at that time.

It was also the task of the watchman to give warning when danger is approaching. The watchman needs to cry out while danger is still on the horizon. Warning the people when the enemy is already inside the gate means that the

watchman has failed in his job. The townspeople believing that there is no danger when there is real danger is really bad for the townspeople.

Ezekiel was given the task of being a watchman for the house of Israel. The people of Israel were living in sin, were living in defiance of the covenant God had made with them. The people of Israel did not believe that they were in danger. But they needed to be warned that they were in danger. Ezekiel was not sitting in judgment of them. He was offering words of life and peace by saying to them, “O wicked one, you will surely die if you do not turn from your ways.”

Ezekiel was crying out in the hope that the wicked one turns and is healed and none of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. That is the Gospel. More specifically, that is the functioning of the authoritative Word of God as Law and Gospel.

St. Paul reminding his readers in our Epistle reading from 1st Corinthians that we must not indulge in sexual immorality is not Paul sitting in judgment of them. He is being a watchman. Those who have abandoned what God ordained to be good or who have called good that which Scripture says is evil are in danger – no matter how much the world tells them they are not in danger. Merrily going about your way in blissful ignorance in a town with no watchman is a dangerous way to live.

But not everyone is called to be a watchman – and that is a good thing. As the hymn writer says, “If you cannot speak like angels, If you cannot preach like Paul, You can tell the love of Jesus, You can say He died for all. If you cannot rouse the wicked With the judgment’s dread alarms, You can lead the little children To the Savior’s waiting arms.”

So the goal and aim of the watchmen who have been burdened with the authority to rouse the wicked with judgment's dread alarms and warn them that they must turn, must repent, from their evil ways or they will die – the good news being that the blood of Christ is sufficient to cover all of your sins (no matter how terrible you think they are). And being covered in the righteousness of Christ, none of the sins you have committed will be remembered against you.

The goal and aim of those exercising that authority is the same goal and aim of those who tell of the love of Jesus in the simplest of terms, that He died for all, and in gentleness leading the children to the Savior's waiting arms.

God has given different burdens and different vocations to each of us. That is true within the church. That is true within the family. That is true within the state. We exercise the authority we have been given by God. We live under the authority which God has put in place over us. All of this is done keeping in mind that we ultimately live under One Authority, our Father in heaven who loves all of His children. As we heard the Lord say through Ezekiel, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked."

Therefore He sends His watchmen to give warning, and He sends out the gentle souls who speak nothing but words of love and peace. We all have different vocations and therefore different authority, yet the same aim and goal in serving. As the hymn writer says, "Take the task He gives you gladly, Let His work your pleasure be; Answer quickly when He calleth, 'Here am I, send me, send me!'" Amen.