**Sermon 14th Pentecost - Labor Day**

**Sept. 5th & 6th 2020**

**Title: “The Watchman”**

**Texts: Ez. 33:7-9, Matt. 18:1-20, Ps. 32:1-7, Rm. 13:1-10**

**Prayer & Salutation**

**Bridge**

 **Many of you know that Shirreen and I just got back from a trip to Wyoming. On our long drive we used our GPS to guide us on our way. It seemed to me that this trip was a bit different. It seemed to me that our guide lady wasn’t taking us the same way as before. She was making changes as we went along. This was disturbing to me, but I relied on her completely and in the end, I prayed that she knew what she was doing, for she could see what I couldn’t and the possible dangers that were on our route. She wanted us to be both safe and home in a decent amount of time. She wanted to protect us. That is her job. And she never gets Labor Day off!**

 **That is what a Watchman does. A watchman, like a man in a crows’ nest on a ship, like a guard on a wall, or a pastor in a pulpit, is there to guide and warn. And that is evident in each of our texts today. Each of the texts show us what a watchman does from a practically *spiritual*****point of view. As one of your pastors, I’m supposed to fulfill that role as part of my ministry. Like the GPS, on my phone, that is my job. I take it seriously. To show you how seriously I understand this role to be, let’s open the Word to the Ez. 33 text and begin. (Read)**

 **The text is very to the point. Up until this point in OT history, Ezekiel is a prophet to the world and has condemned them for their actions. But here, God changes his role. He makes him a Watchman of the house of Israel. And in that role, he is to warn them of what will come if they don’t do a certain thing. What is that? Repent and turn from evil. Any wicked person is to be warned of their sin and told they will die, spiritually for sure, but also possibly, physically, if they don’t change their ways. I say that to you as well. Think that’s tough? Certainly is, but not as tough as the consequences given to Ezekiel. For if he were NOT to warn them, their death would be held in his hands! Ezekiel took this warning for the house of Israel and for him, very seriously! And so do I, for you see, all of your pastors are a Watchman for each and every one of you. We take this role very seriously. But we cannot tell you what will happen tomorrow or predict the future in any way, for we are not prophets in that sense of the word. However, we can and do say that we are in the end times. We have been for 2000 years and the urgency seems ever more to the forefront of our lives. It’s a very confused world out there. And you struggle every day with it don’t you? What do we do about this or that societal thing today? How do I make such an important decision? That is why we say like Solomon said, “There is a time for every purpose under heaven.” Now is the time unto salvation. The Lord is near. So where do we go? The Word. For everything.**

 **Law**

 **Then, what are we pastors to warn you of and guide you away from? Are we to guide you into social actions that may or may not be good for you? Are we to guide you to invest in things for your future financial gain or loss so that the church may reap a reward? Are we to warn you so that we guide you in *anything* of this world? No, for we are merely in this world and not part of it. We are to guide you to Christ and His Word, which protects you from this world and the evil it leads you to. There is spiritual warfare going on all around us. Do you see it? I hope and pray you do! Therefore, I warn you that the world is nowhere to place your trust. It is where sin abounds and don’t let the devil lead you to ruin in it. His GPS app is one of chaos. With it he will lead you down roads that will cause you to be deceived. He is the god of Chaos! And when you follow him, he will lead you to riotous behavior, which only leads to sin. He will make you think that the road to happiness is focused on your needs, your desires, your ideas. But that is just a distraction. He’s good at distractions. He’ll lead you to something that seems a benefit to all people, something so good, so ripe, so tasty. Something so easy to pluck from the tree and eat. But it’s artificial. It’s not real. And then, he’ll say, “Oh look! A butterfly!”, and he’ll lead you to the next sin. Don’t fall for it! He is the god of this world. We are in his world, but as Christ’s redeemed, we are not part of it. Flee and resist him and his demons at every turn is my strong warning to each of you. Don’t be the one sheep that goes astray! I will not stand for it! I will not have your blood on my hands after the destroyer tears you apart and devours you! For in these last days, I am fulfilling His commands by telling you His Word. Listen to the Good News of what Christ does for you!**

**Gospel**

 **The Gospel text today is split up into three separate sections. The above referenced section of the sheep that goes astray from the hundred is one of my favorites. I’ve shared it with you often. I’m sure you remember. Right? In other messages, I’ve mentioned living in Wyoming and knowing shepherds before. Remember that? If you don’t, I WANT you to remember this one!**

 **First, nothing is more important to me than your staying in the fold. Ezekiel pointed to Christ, having been appointed by God to be His spokesman and warn and guide the sheep. And in these parables, Christ, “The Great Watchman” warns us, leads us, and guides us gently as He so often does. He is the One that searches for us and is happy when He finds us lost in the thickets of life. Secondly, He speaks to us about humility, where we often fail to recognize that we place ourselves first in everything, falling for the lie of Satan that we can be like Gods. We cannot. So, thereafter, we are to act like children, as the first parable says, humble and asking for forgiveness and knowing our sin. Our Psalm for the day expresses that wonderful Good News that in this way, we are forgiven through the all-atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross for us, for He is faithful and just. And there, gazing at His outstretched arms, we say, “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O Righteous, and shout for joy all upright in heart!” Thirdly, Jesus guides to say just what I and Ezekiel have said to you, for He is the Great Watchman saying, “Woe to the world for temptations to sin!” He knew we would be tempted, and He knew by whom. And Jesus’ warning is just as stark as mine. Don’t do it! For He says this, “It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire!” He warns us that, indeed, there are consequences for sin. That, my brothers and sisters, is a Watchman that cares for you. That is Good News.**

 **Last of all, Jesus guides you to be Watchmen as well. As people of God, aware of the consequences of sin, warned by the Watchmen in our lives to live just and Holy lives before God and men, we share the Good News that when we do sin, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins when we humbly ask for forgiveness through Christ who has paid the price, so that we who deserve only death, receive life. All of us have the name Ezekiel. It’s not just me and the other pastors who are responsible to God for spreading the Good News and telling others that to be reconciled they need to go to Christ for forgiveness. Nope. It’s you all, too. You have a post as a guard on the wall, too. And in the last section of the text, Jesus tells us exactly what to do when someone, especially a brother in Christ, sins against us. It is extremely specific. And in the modern mind somewhat hard to grasp. Why? Because these days, justice is sometimes never served. The devil likes that! But as Jesus says here, it is to be called out! We can’t just condone sin, for like a rotten apple, sin will destroy the whole barrel. We have a tendency to let sin to fester. And sin gets bolder each day. When that happens, it becomes evil to the core. So how many times do we forgive? As many as it takes, just like Jesus says. *But* He also says, “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Sin is to be called out and condemned. It is a harsh reality that we Christians need to face. But we pray for those who do not listen. Those who continue to sin. For they can be forgiven.**

 **Therefore, Jesus guides us to live a sanctified life. His Word, like the Lutheran Bible App, and like the GPS app I have on my phone, guides me in it. Listening to Him do so is also my job, as an individual believer. And Paul tells us the very same thing. He was our Watchman, “The Watchman to the Gentiles”, who summed up these things we have spoken of this day for us perfectly. When we speak these words of repentance and salvation that we have learned to one another, we do it in love. We, knowing we have salvation in Christ by grace through faith and not of works, share what we have experienced in Christ with others that they may experience the same. That they may experience forgiveness and joy like we have. That they may experience the love of Christ and fulfill the law in love and not in fear. “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.” We live sanctified lives by and in love, through Christ, for God and for our neighbor. That is what we watchmen who have learned by the Spirit, in a very practical way- do. We bring comfort to each other and the world, even in times that are tough like today. As we wait for Him, may God lead you as you go forth in the world, sharing what you know is true from the Word. In Jesus name. Amen.**