

Sermon for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

In the days before a
hurricane makes landfall, people living in harm's way generally receive a
message from the weather service - from those "watchmen" tasked with keeping
an
eye out for deadly storms and warning the people to seek safety. These
"watchmen"
deliver a two-fold message: First, that a deadly storm is coming, and second, that
the way of life is to turn from what you are doing and evacuate!

This is basically a "Law
and Gospel" message: namely, that death is coming, but that a way of life is
available
(Thanks to Rev McCoy, "A Service of Repentance and Prayer," 2005).

Imagine, however, if
the watchmen failed to do their job... if a storm like Laura or Katrina made
landfall without warning - the hundreds or even thousands of people who would
die.

They would die
because they would have remained been utterly unaware of their peril, and

therefore

would not have turned toward safety. What's more, those responsible for issuing the warning would be held accountable as well - and certainly, things would not go well for them, either.

Thankfully, the

warnings DO go out, and yet, many people still die, right? Why is that? The answer

is, among those who are given warning, many chose not to go the way of life. They

choose instead to continue doing what they are doing so that when the storm comes,

it's too late, and there is no escape.

I bring this up to

make several points about our OT reading this morning. The first and foremost is that watchmen have a responsibility to warn people of danger, and they can either sound the warning, or not. If they sound the warning, they have done their job. If they do not, people will die, and they will be held accountable. That's all there is to it.

The second point is

that the watchman's message has two parts - a "Law" part, which reveals the approach

of death, and a "Gospel" part, which shows the way of life. After all, it does no good to tell people they are going to die if there is nothing that can be done about it - The whole point is to show them the way of rescue and safety.

The third point we

should observe from our text today is that whether the people live or die depends on whether they heed the warning and go the way of life, or ignore the warning and continue in the way of death. Ultimately, the watchman has no control over that... The watchman is simply accountable for "keeping the message

straight and getting the message out” (A.L. Berry) as the blessed Al Berry, past president of the LCMS used to say - he can do nothing more, but must do nothing less!

In our reading this morning, God makes Ezekiel a watchman. But now the warning he gives has nothing to do with hurricanes, floods, or even the mere death of the body. Rather, Ezekiel, and all God’s watchmen for that matter, are entrusted with warning people of a far greater danger, namely, the “second death,” - the everlasting death in the fires of hell for all who sin and fall short of the glory of God. Jesus says, “the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death (Rev 21:8);” [So] do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).” Be VERY afraid...

That’s the Law part of the message - and it is the task of the watchman to make absolutely sure that people get that message. The storm of God’s wrath is coming, and all who sin will die. But remember, that’s just part one, because the watchman’s message has two parts: Law AND Gospel. “The wicked WILL surely die (Eze 33:8),” according to our text - That’s the Law. But clearly, there is also a way to safety - a way back to life. And THAT’S the point of the message; that’s the purpose of the watchman: to warn people of approaching death so they may TURN from what they are doing to go the way of life - the way that God Himself provides through repentance and the forgiveness of sins - the way He has opened once for all by Christ crucified and risen for the life of the entire world - the way opened for US through the curtain of Christ’s Body and Blood (Heb 10:20) who is here for You today to rescue You from the fires of hell and to fill you with eternal life.

Through the water of

Baptism, you have already been set forth on this Way to life, and now you remain on that Way when hear the watchman's Word, heed his warning, and turn back from your sins to receive the life that is spoken for you through the Words of Holy Absolution -

The Words, "I forgive you," the water, the bread and wine, the Body and Blood - these are the gifts that deliver the benefits of Christ crucified and risen for YOU. These are the gifts that shelter you from the storm of God's coming wrath.

And there's more... for when you hear the warning and turn toward safety, you can also make sure the people around you get the memo so that they, too, may turn to safety. For if the truth be told, God cares for each and every one of His sheep - He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but desires that the wicked turn from their way and live (Eze 33:11). Which is why, when someone strays and goes the way of sin into danger and death, the Lord can actually have good use of YOU to show them the way to life! As one who has been warned, you now have the privilege of seeking and saving the lost - of proclaiming God's Word - of speaking His warning and showing those in danger the way back to life through repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus makes it clear that greatness in the kingdom of heaven comes only by faith and dependence on Christ for forgiveness - that greatness in the kingdom has nothing to do with how much money you give or how determined you are to show your love for God, but rather by loving your neighbor enough to show them their sin and their peril, trusting in God to have good use of you to show them the way back to life and salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

So whatever you do, do not abandon your neighbor to sin - that is not loving! (And by all means, don't be the CAUSE of their sin - things will go REALLY badly for

you if you go there...) (Matt 18:6)

Rather, love them

the way Christ has loved you - Reach out to them and make whatever sacrifice is necessary to show them their sin and the way back to life. Rejoice that the Lord has given You His Word and now has good use of YOU as His watchman to seek

and to save the lost; to "keep the message straight and get the message out;" to be the very means by which others are rescued from sure and certain death to life everlasting.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 33:7-9