September 6th, 2026 Pastor Priewe

15th Sunday after Pentecost Ezekiel 33:7-11

God Wants You to Live!

1) So he sends watchmen to warn you

2) So he sends you as a watchman to warn others.

In the name of our great God and Savior who wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth!

Jump into a time machine with me for a moment and transport yourselves back about 2600 years to the time of Ezekiel the prophet. Imagine you're living in one of those ancient walled cities where the main nucleus of the city is inside the big outer walls of defense, but most of the people live in houses and work in the field outside the city walls. So there you are going about your day, plowing your field behind your donkey, when all of a sudden the shrill sound of the trumpet blasts through the otherwise quiet morning.

What does the signal mean? Similar to our modern day Tornado Warning signal, the trumpet blast signals, "Danger is imminent!" But it's not for a tornado, it's for an army that's coming to destroy the city! There's no time to lose. The watchman has sounded the horn. It's time to get inside the city walls. It's time to turn back from what you were doing in the field and get to safety! So as you and everyone around drop what you were doing and start to make a dash for the city walls, you run by a guy who is still plowing in the wrong direction. "Come on, Jedidiah!" You scream, "You heard the trumpet blast! The army is coming! We've gotta get behind the walls."

But Jed, oh Jed, he's too stubborn. Jed wanted to get this field plowed by noon. "No time to waste!" says Jed, and he plows ahead in the wrong direction, all sense and caution to the wind. What's going to happen to him when the enemy army gets there? Jed's going to be a goner. The watchmen had sounded the horn, but Jed didn't heed the warning. He's going to die, and his blood is going to be on his own head.

You and the others make it back to the walls and turn around just in time to see it happen—Jed's destruction! What a shame, it didn't have to be this way. If only he'd listened to the watchman's warning, but Jed just couldn't save himself from… himself. And as foolish as he seems, I know all too well what it's like to be Jed.

This is the metaphor of *the Watchman* that God crafted for the ministry and call of his prophet Ezekiel. **"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel," (Ezekiel 33:7).** Ezekiel was to be the watchman high up on the walls, alert and ready, watching and waiting for an enemy army to appear on the horizon, and most important of all, ready to sound the horn for all to hear and heed the warning, and take cover in time. This watchman imagery would've been fresh on the minds of the exiled people of Israel sitting in Babylon, the exiles to whom Ezekiel had been sent. Not long ago they had seen the army of Babylon converge on the city Jerusalem and carry off the first wave of captives, and the army was soon to come again.

But Ezekiel wasn't called as a watchman for the physical welfare of Jerusalem, he was called as a watchman for the spiritual welfare of those exiles in Babylon. He was sent with a warning from God, both for them 2600 years ago and for us in the year 2026. **"Hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 'When I say to the wicked, "You wicked person, you will surely die."' (Ezekiel 33:8)**

"Wowsers!" we might think. "Ezekiel was really bringing the fire and brimstone. I'm not sure who he was supposed to go and talk to, but I'm sure it couldn't be me. I'm not wicked, sure I'm not perfect, but I'm not worthy of death." We like to try to squirm off the hook, but there is an old self, the wicked flesh of a sinner, who loves to sin and then defend it, and that sinner living in each one of us is truly worthy of the sentence Ezekiel declares in chapter 18. **"The soul who sins is the one who shall die." (Ezekiel 18:20).** And not just physically, but spiritually and eternally. So before we do any thinking or talking about being our brother's keeper, we first need to take God's warning to heart for ourselves.

The God who declares that death sentence on sinners is the one who knows everything about everyone who has ever walked this earth so that not one of us can hide a single sin—they are all out in the open before him. And yet, this Holy God who would have millions of sin-reasons to condemn and punish us eternally, is the God who still shows us his heart. **"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live**." (Ezekiel 33:11) Translation? God doesn't want you to die. He doesn't want people to go to hell! ***GOD WANTS YOU TO LIVE!*** And not just live physically a long prosperous life, but live spiritually and eternally with him!

This desire of God for us to live isn't just some pie in the sky wish that he can't really do anything about like me wishing the Brewers will finally win a World Series. This will and desire of God spurs him on to intense and decisive action. He wants us to live so he sends word to us to confront us in our sin. He sends watchmen like Ezekiel to sound the horn, "*Death and the Devil are coming to destroy you! If you keep going the way you are going you will certainly not make it out alive."* He sends messengers, like my parents and my pastors and teachers, and Christian friends to call out my sin and hold me accountable. God sends and sends and sends his messengers with the message of his law, not because he wants to beat us over the head with the club of the law, but because he wants to turn us back from the path that leads to destruction. So when those messengers come to you, to warn you, to correct you, see them from what they are—not meddlers who should mind their own business—but messengers of God's love 1) *He sends watchmen to me and to you* precisely because he loves you!

It really is a wonder how much and how many warnings it takes to turn us back from destruction. Before I lamented that I knew far too well what it was like to be like stubborn Jed and not heed the warning. During this past week, I was looking for something in our little cabinet nook where we stick the important papers that come in the mail, and I pulled out a stack of recall notices, with a big red stop sign on each one that come from the dealership. There's a recall on the airbag on our truck. Call to schedule it, bring it in, no cost! Notice after notice! 10 of them right here, and some of them I've thought really hard about scheduling and then never scheduled.

If only that were only true about ignoring the recalls on a truck, and not about the warning signs of spiritual life which are not safe to ignore. How many commandments, how many sermons, how many warnings from how many watchmen do we ignore, while the enemy army marches right up to us ready to kill us! **"Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)** Like Jed, this isn't what he wants for us. It doesn't have to be this way!

So what does God do? In the past he spoke in many ways by all kinds of prophets and messengers, but then he cuts to the chase. He sends a part of himself, his own Son, to save us from ourselves. The Son of God is wrapped in flesh as the Son of Man, and he comes down. He comes with the same message—Repent! Turn! And then the Son of Man forges a path outside the city to the cross where he faces off with all the armies of sin, death, and the devil on our behalf. There the one soul who did not sin was the one who died for us who deserved it. But by his very death, as promised so long ago, he crushed their heads in death, so that you and I might not die but live! GOD WANTS YOU TO LIVE so badly that he sent his Son to his death so that you could have life!

And now by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself for you, you do live! He has turned you back to himself to walk in his ways and live a new life. ***2) Now, because he also wants all to live, God sends you as watchmen to warn others!*** "No, no, not I," we may object in false piety. "Surely I can't tell someone else about their sin when I have so much of my own! That would make me a hypocrite!"

Yes, I suppose that is so. It does make me a hypocrite—someone who breaks the same rules they preach. It's quite an interesting conundrum of the Christian faith that outside of Jesus Christ the Righteous One, every other single person God has ever spoken through has been a sinner who breaks God's law, and still has been sent with the task of speaking to other sinners. Moses murdered, David committed adultery and murder, Paul persecuted. Peter disowned. Priewe…you don't want to know. And you too, despite your sins, you are part of the body of Christ! The Lord called us all not only out of darkness, but also to service as his people—making

disciples, using the keys, the binding key to refuse forgiveness to those who refuse to repent, and the loosing key to forgive those who do repent.

So maybe a more accurate term for us than outright hypocrites is that we're *hypocrites in recovery*. Yes, we have broken God's commands, but God has called us to confess the sins that we've committed and lay them at the foot of the cross. He's called us to turn away from them, struggle as we might to do that. He's called us to first take the planks out of our own eyes, before we zero in on the specks of dust in the eyes of others. We take all of these warnings to heart first for ourselves so that his church continues to be a hospital for sinners and hypocrites in recovery.

2) But then he has also sent us, his believers as watchmen to warn others, our members, our family, our friends, because he wants them to live too! Long ago, he charged a sinner like Ezekiel with the critical task of sounding the warning to the people of Israel! **"Hear the word I speak and give them warning from me…If you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable!"** Ezekiel 33:8. If you see the danger and don't warn, you share in the blame. On the other hand, if you do sound the warning, but they don't listen, then it's not on you.

It is a bit of daunting and scary task. Who knows how they'll react. But God also gives us a framework in Matthew 18 to use as *hypocrites in recovery*. **"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen, you have won them over." (Matthew 18:15)** That's the goal—that you might turn them back from sin and death so that they live! If they don't listen, don't give up, take two or three with you, and if they still don't listen, bring it to the church, that the whole body might plead with and call them to repentance, a whole congregation of people serving as brothers and sisters and keepers to each other. And God promises to stand behind the work we carry out in his name.

See at the heart of all this warning and confronting is God's heart, and the rejoicing he wants to do with all his angels over every sinner who repents and trusts in him. He wants all people to be saved, so he has sent others to you, and you to others. He truly wants us all to turn, turn from our ways and live!