

"Ministers represent death" the woman said. She was in a room full of ministers as she said it. We were gathered for a conference on how to minister to people in cases of trauma, where there has been sudden or severe injury or death. She was a part of a panel talking about their ministers and what they did during the hours and days and months following their accidents. "ministers represent death in most people's minds" As she said it I thought of the times I went to the door to tell a parent that a child was dead. The times I prayed, Lord now let your servant depart in peace over one who was dying. I thought of funeral homes and funerals.

A long time ago I realized that so much of what happens in those moments when death is near depends on the foundation that has already been laid. I have no magic words to speak that can make up for a lifetime of neglect. <sup>to hear God's word</sup> ~~Many have not thought much about God.~~ <sup>I have to cry out to God & the other</sup> ~~They~~ have not shared the pain of sisters and brothers in their hours of need. <sup>or</sup> ~~They~~ have never learned how to sacrifice, to let go of what is not important. They have not learned and lived day by day what is essential. ~~When the moment comes when I must knock on their door, or pray beside their bed or bury their husband or wife, there is so little to build on,~~ They have never learned how to trust in God.

Take heed, watch; said Jesus, for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on watch. Watch, therefore - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight or at cockcrow or in the morning - lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch.

How to get ready for the end of the world, that is the question. For nearly two thousand years the people have readied themselves for the moment

when the master of the house would come. But time and again the end of their world came in a way they never expected.

Last Tuesday, one of the people on the panel told us her story. The sirens filled the night. The ambulance, the fire truck raced by. Must have been a bad accident somewhere, she thought to herself. An hour later her mother-in-law called. Bob and his brother had hit a tree. The brother was dead, Bob was badly burned.

As she told us her story, beside her sat Bob, less than a year ago a strong young man, just returned from his time in the service. Now he was in a wheel chair, arms and shoulders thin, his face greatly disfigured by the burns. She told of a church that stood beside them as they went through a hell. Tears came to my eyes as she told of her joy the first time Bob was able to return to church to be greeted by applause as he was wheeled down the aisle. Most of all she told of a God who was her strength as doctors told her her husband would die, and as she has come to grips with what it will mean that her husband will live.

Jesus says to watch. Yet how do we watch for what we cannot see coming?

Today is commitment Sunday. Each of you have done some thinking, I hope, about what your God is asking of you. You have done some thinking about what your church needs from you. But now, at this time I want you to do some considering what you need to do to get yourself ready for the end of the world, or the end of your world. What can you do to ready yourself for that moment when the sirens and ambulances are for one you love? Jesus says, Watch, and that is certainly the first thing you can do.

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples just before he would gathered them in the upper room for his Last earthly supper with them. He said watch again as Peter and James and John went with him as he prayed in the garden of Gethesamne. Watch. Through the denial of Peter, through trial and crucifixion, through burial, to resurrection, Jesus tells us all to



watch. We will see how Jesus depended upon the Father, even when the day turned to darkness and all creation abandoned him. We will see how the Father will not abandon his own, even if he must begin life again from beyond the end. Watch.

As we watch Jesus, as we hear his story time and again. We sing his story time and again and the story of all that God has done in the history of his people. The more God's story is planted in our hearts, the more we will believe and confess as Paul does in our second lesson, God is faithful. There is no greater preparation that can be ours than this assurance in our hearts, God is faithful.

I marvel at how much healing depends on that assurance. Not ~~so~~ much the healing of the body, but the healing of the spirit, the keeping of a person whole. One person suffers tragedy, and they come apart. They disintegrate. Their life is just pieces, and remains just pieces. Another person suffers a similar tragedy and though they come apart for a time, clinging to the God who is faithful brings them together again. They become whole once more.

Today is commitment Sunday. I want each of us to commit ourselves in those ways that will bring a growth in faith, readying ourselves for that moment when what always happened to the other guy happens to us.

There is no better way for you to be prepared than for you to be with those who are suffering. Hand out food at a hunger center, or take the meals on wheels to the elderly. You will grow as you learn the names and hear the stories of these people. Give up some play time to share a moment of their time.

Commitment yourself to grow in Bible study.

Ask a member of the Adult Bible class or of a circle what has helped them most in these studies. Many will say, "Hearing how others have found strength, how God has answered prayers, or simply learning that others facethe struggles I too face. You will grow, not because you can memorize

more scripture but because faith and life come together when God's people study together, and we are less alone.

Commit yourself to giving more than you think you can afford to give. This too is a learning to walk in faith, testing God's faithfulness before the day when there will be nothing to cling to but that faithfulness. Our giving is a little like a team practicing for the big game. The discipline of giving now will ready us for those moments when every bit of our believing will be tested to the limit. If I can't learn to trust in God to get me through with one or five or ten percent of my given away now, how will I ever learn to trust him when a job is lost, or when an economy crumbles around me.

Today is commitment Sunday. You can look upon this day as a church trying to take something from you. Or you can see this day and the commitments you make as a preparation for the time in your life when everything will be at stake, and faith will matter more than anything else.

Jesus said, Take heed, watch; for ye do not know when the time will come. What I say to you I say to all: Watch.