

Text: Ezekiel 33:7-11. Pentecost 16.

**September 24, 2017.**

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus. Amen.

Imagine your next-door neighbor's house is on fire. It's a Saturday morning. 5 am. You'd been talking the night before. Your neighbor mentioned, "I can't wait. Tomorrow is my first day off in weeks. I'll finally get to sleep in tomorrow." He wants to sleep in. But his house is on fire! What's the loving thing to do? Obviously, you call him if you have his phone number. You knock on the door if he doesn't wake up. I'm guessing you'd even break a window if you had to, smash open the glass patio door to get in, rescue him, save him. What a loving act of sacrifice that would be! Can you imagine your joy if your neighbor made it out alive? Do you think he would mind missing his morning to sleep in? Not at all! Wouldn't he rather be grateful, and be grateful for the rest of his life that you risked your life to rescue him? Look around you this morning. Say a prayer of thanks to God for every single one of your brothers and sisters in Jesus who is here today, hearing God's Word, receiving forgiveness, getting strength. But as you look around, you probably also notice a precious person who is missing, a blood-bought brother who didn't bother to be here. It's easy to think, "He'll be here next week." And it's easy to say, "She must just be out of town." But did you know we have almost 400 members in our congregation and on a good weekend only 250 are in worship? Is it best to do nothing? Now let's be clear. I'm not asking you to look around so you can say, "I'm better than all those people who are not here. And God I thank you I'm not like all those bad people who blew off church today." No. We are all fellow sinners. We are all in a burning house. We would all be headed for hell if Jesus hadn't lifted us out with his love, lifted us up with the cross on which he was lifted up, lifted us up to heaven by saving us from our sins, turned us from our sinful ways and turned us to a path with him, a perfect path to heaven.

My brothers and sisters, God has called us to turn fellow sinners from sin. It won't be easy. There will be plenty of reasons not to. But God's desire is that he turn all of us from sin. God wants us to be his tools to help turn fellow sinners from sin. Turn fellow sinners from sin.

God had a special spokesman, a man name Ezekiel. God had made Ezekiel a watchman. This was a very important position. God described the situation earlier in this same chapter of the Bible. Cities in those days had high and thick walls. At key points, there were even higher watchtowers. You couldn't attack a city by air before planes. You had to attack by land. The watchman in the tower had a life or death job. See the enemy coming? Blow the trumpet. Let everyone know to get ready. See the enemy coming and don't blow the trumpet and no one gets ready and the city is destroyed. And the watchman is to blame. God also called Ezekiel to literally be God's mouth. Ezekiel was to speak God's Word, not his own. Ezekiel was to shine God's light on sin. Ezekiel was to proclaim God's judgment. Sounds a lot like us today. God calls us to speak God's Word, not our own. God calls us to shine his light on sin. And yes, God calls us to speak God's judgment. It's not our judgment. It's God's judgment. We are the watchmen, sounding the warning about sin.

You know the watchman was a fellow inhabitant of the city. If the city was destroyed, he was destroyed. We are fellow sinners sounding a warning to fellow sinners. We are not standing in judgment above other sinners. We are standing alongside fellow sinners, working to turn fellow sinners from sin, speaking God's Word to rescue fellow sinners from sin. The movie Dunkirk was about the real-life evacuation across the English Channel, to save English and French troops from the invading Nazis. Many soldiers made it onto boats to carry them to the safety of England, only to have those boats shot down and thousands of soldiers jumping overboard into gasoline-filled and oil-slicked waters. But some of the soldiers made it to other boats, dirty, oily, dangerously covered with gas. It was other dirty, oily soldiers

pulling them up to the safety of other boats. That's what we are, dirty and oily with sin, pulling fellow sinners out of the dangerous waters that could ignite with fire at any time. We're no better than others. We just want God to save others.

And yet, what do we so often do, or not do? We make sin small, tiny, nonexistent. It's not my place to meddle. I'd be a hypocrite if I warned someone else about sin. I'm a sinner too! They'll throw that in my face! Maybe they came on Thursday, or Monday, or the Sunday I wasn't here. I'd look foolish.

My fellow sinners, you don't have to approach fellow sinners with fire and brimstone passion, but with compassion for a fellow sinner. You can ask me if they've been here at worship. I'll be happy to share and happy to give you some words to say. In fact, how about giving some words to turn fellow sinners from sin, right now? Start by saying, "This isn't easy for me. I'm a fellow sinner. All I want is for you to be close to Jesus. I love you. I'm concerned for you. I'm concerned that your time away from God's house could be drawing you away from Jesus. I need you here to help me in my faith. I'm a weak sinner and I just want to help you turn from this sin as I want you to turn me from my sin."

God does not mess around with sin. We dare not ignore sin or make sin too small. Did you see the very serious consequences God attaches to sin? That wicked man will die for his sin! Die! For his sin! God is talking about death in every sense you can imagine. God means physical death. We all die physically because we all have sinned. God means spiritual death, a physical life with a soul separated from God. And yes, worst of all, God means eternal death. Our houses are all burning around us and we all need someone to warn us, to rescue us, to turn us from sin! Or we will die! And if we don't speak when we see a fellow sinner walking his way to hell, God is very clear, "I will hold you accountable!"

But, let's picture the other scenario. Let's say you don't make sin too small, you don't ignore the burning house and instead you speak to a fellow sinner to turn him from sin. And he listens! What a joy! One more fellow sinner rescued. One more fellow sinner pulled from the dangerous oily waters that are about to catch fire. One more sinner saved! One more person rescued! Doesn't that one make all the work worth it, all the risk and potential embarrassment? Now God is clear that we can't force results. We don't force people into believing and turning from sin. We only speak the Word, sound God's warning and we leave the results to God.

Here's another thing which could happen. Perhaps you or the fellow sinner you are longing to turn from sin, makes sin too big. Did you catch that in our reading? Our offenses and sins weigh us down and we are wasting away because of them. Have you felt that heavy weight of sin? Maybe one lost temper with a child, one angry word with a spouse, one lazy day you didn't help a friend or were too busy to just listen? And you feel it physically. Sick to your stomach. Trouble sleeping at night. Or maybe worse, you are wasting away spiritually. The one night of drunkenness you can't get out of your mind. That one dark moment of unfaithfulness that all the church attendance in the world can't erase. We can waste away because of guilt. God could never love you! God can forgive some sins, but not that one!

What's the answer to that voice? What's the solution to that guilt? Hear God's answer, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live!" God's desire is for us to live! God sent Jesus so we live. Jesus gives us perfect life, by giving us his own perfection. Jesus gives us forgiven life, by giving us forgiveness on the cross, by placing forgiveness into our hands with his own body and blood. Jesus gives us eternal life, by rising from the dead and opening the gates of heaven to all who believe. Breathe a deep and relieving sigh. The weight is lifted. It's all on Jesus. The wasting away is over. It's all on Jesus. The guilt is gone, once and for all. God forgave that guilt. It's certain. As surely as God lives. And he does live. As surely as Jesus is alive, he wants nothing more than for us to be alive, with him, forever, in perfection, in heaven. I know this part of God's Word has lots of law and sin

and death. But look where it ends: with life. God doesn't want us to die. He wants us to live. God didn't create us to die. He created us to live. God does not want one person, not one single person, to be in hell. God wants every single person and every married person and every person to live.

That's God's answer, to turn us from sin. That's God's action, to turn us from sin so we live. When we think sin is too small, we turn to God and realize the great price Jesus had to pay for our sins and turn to God in thankfulness that Jesus paid for our "big" sins and our "small" sins and every one of our sins. When we think sin is too big and God could never forgive us, we turn to God and we throw the guilt on Jesus, we throw the pain on Jesus, we throw the weight on Jesus and Jesus lifts it away and we live. And we live and we live.

And we live to turn fellow sinners from sin, just as God turned us from sin. Who's your one fellow sinner for whom you are a watchman? Is it someone for whom you were a sponsor at their baptism?

Remember you still are a sponsor, to keep them turned to Jesus. Are you a sponsor for a brother or sister here at Resurrection? Just an email or a text with a Bible passage and a word of encouragement could turn them back. It's even ok if you send that during the offering, just so you don't forget. Do you have someone in your family, who grew up getting the same training in God's Word, but only shows up in church when there's family pressure at Easter? You're no better than that family member. You're a fellow sinner. But God has made you a watchman. And you could have the greatest joy of all, to turn a fellow sinner from sin. You could have the greatest life of all, eternal life, with Jesus, in heaven. Amen.