

Watch!

But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. Luke 21:25-36

It was late Thursday afternoon and I was driving home, listening to the radio. “There is an incredible backup on the road” said the announcer. The RIDE program (Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere) program is in effect.

It seems a strange thing doesn't it. The time of the year which should bring us closest to Christ and therefore purity and holiness is also the time that drunkenness increases so that the police put out the check points. It's also the time of year when thefts increase and people seem most desperate. Year end deadlines approach. People panic, work longer hours, become hurried and harried by this life. Anxiety seems to increase in the shorter days. The night rules.

Into this mix comes the Advent warning of watch. The Holy Spirit wishes to grab us by the lapels and give us a good shake. “Watch!” “Look Up!” “Don't let the things of this world and the addictions of this world and especially the scheduling constraints of this world weigh you down so that you forget your true calling.

Watch that you never get sidetracked. We all have priorities. And some things might not get done. So what to do? The Christian should not doubt his priority. The first commandment leads him to confess:

“You shall have no other gods before me”.

And then Jesus' words may be considered explanatory of the commandment: “But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you”. (Matthew 6:33)

There is nothing more important than your relationship with God. The fact that you hear my voice means that you are off to a good start –more unlikely than others more negligent to allow the world to consume you. Still, Satan will try. And though the weekly service is powerful food we need pray for our daily bread for the soul. Maybe you remember the Sunday school hymn: “Read your bible pray every day, pray every day, pray every day. Read your bible; pray every day if you want to grow”. It is true. During the Christmas Season when we need more rather than less of God's Word, when we need more rather than less time in prayer, when we need more rather than less of encouragement from our brothers and sisters in Christ, Satan is there to say, “You have no time for that”!

Resist this raptors logic. Watch that you don't get sidetracked. Saying we have no time for Bible reading, prayer, devotion, Christian fellowship ought to be considered as foolish as the scuba diver going for a swim down into the depths yet looking at his pressure gage on his wrist entering the red saying, “I have no time for that”. As air is to the physical body, the Spirit is to our soul. Spirit is also

translated “wind” and what is the wind except air? Without this wind our soul perishes. Without this air the body perishes.

We need to be as Luther who is quoted as saying, “I have so much to accomplish today that I must begin with 1 or 2 hours in prayer”. In a similar spirit I find myself saying “I need the strength of God’s Word and Sacrament! I need the nourishment of his true body and blood. I hear Jesus tell me: “My body is real food. My blood is real drink”. As a pastor I’m a bit miffed that more aren’t petitioning, even pleading “Why don’t we have every Sunday communion like they do down at Trinity or Redeemer or countless other places”. I am somewhat confused when I see that some aren’t communing even as it is infrequently offered. I feel like the family matron presiding over the great feast and there’s Cousin Jane with a spoonful of rice picking at it like a bird and she’s saying “Come and eat!”

Nevertheless we have the Word today! And with it we have strength! It was strength for our Lord in his humanity as he said battling Satan: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by **bread** alone, but by every **word** that proceeds from the mouth of God.’ (Matthew 4)” and indeed he shares his true humanity, the same humanity we possess.

We should take heart this day when it becomes so easy to give into the sloth of the season. God gives us strength. He gives us strength through Word and Sacrament. And I take hope!

Although the Bible is full of spiritual tragedy it is also full of triumphs. Yes, it is full of stories of David’s and their Bathsheba’s; Solomon types compromising their faith by taking pagan wives; Korah and his rebellion; Demas, once faithful companion and co-worker with Paul tragically making shipwreck of his faith having become overcome by the allure of the world. Yes, there are these stories to be certain. And if you want to stay really close textually we can think of those fallen in drunkenness. Lot and his daughters come to mind. But there are also the heroes of faith and withstanders of temptation. There are those who dare to watch over their souls and look up expectantly for the coming of the Son of Man.

There is Joseph and Potipher’s wife. A young man pursued by the cougar type woman of power. Though pursued relentlessly he did not succumb. If you want to find those successful against the blight of drunkenness think John the Baptist, as taking the vow of the Nazarite he forsook the drink and surely as he forsook the razor to his head. Our Lord though possessing human flesh like us, tempted in every way as we are, nevertheless did not sin. There is Paul proclaiming the promises of God, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you...” There are the five wise virgins who did not have the Bridegroom come upon them unawares. And these are not just characters from a parable but representatives of real people in the knowledge of the Christ. And each of these would possess the humility of the Apostle Paul saying, “It is not me but the Christ who dwells within me”.

The saints, washed clean by the blood of the lamb have their moments. Too many have a defeatist attitude when it comes to sin. We should never error on the side of possessing so much confidence that we become presumptuous in the possibility of withstanding temptation but neither are we to languish in sin-consciousness so deeply that we despair. There is hope to withstand the evil one in the strength of the Lord and many examples can be cited in Scripture. Still, need we stop with Scriptural

examples? We do, after all have the whole history of the saints to present times. We Lutherans remember and commemorate with the whole Church those exceptional examples. .. Though sinners like us, possessing flesh as us, nevertheless resisted to the point of shedding blood and did not succumb to Satan's wiles.

We can stand fast when we are nourished by Word and Sacrament. We can stand tall, ready for judgment when our hearts are expectantly waiting for the coming of the Son of Man. We may be confident to stand before the Christ. Our confidence resides not in ourselves but in the Christ who gives us strength and bestows for us righteousness. In both the Old Testament and Epistle Reading for today we come across this all important term. Malachi is looking forward to the "son of righteousness". Paul, in proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles is looking for the "root of Jesse". Today we sing "O Come, O Come Immanuel" as every Sunday in this Advent Season. We hear the verse "branch of righteousness". We know of whom the author speaks. That branch is Christ. He is the bestower of righteousness. And clothed in the righteousness we stand. We stand confident.

We lit the Second Candle of Advent today. It's hard to believe it has come and hurries so fast. Satan knows that he has only a little time left before the Second Advent of our Lord. The signs of His return are growing larger. Signs in the heavens are growing larger even as our ability to see the stars magnifies them larger and larger. The sound of waters roaring and crashing grows louder even as the seas rise with melting icecaps and global warming.

Satan also knows he has only a little time before we celebrate the great mystery of the incarnation "God assuming human flesh to be our Saviour". His efforts to side-track us with carnal diversions will only increase. Watch for his lying voice. Stand firm for what is important. May the source of our life and author of our Salvation remain first in each of our lives. And as we do, may we rejoice as he raises us up to be with him in heaven always.

Amen.