

## **Watch!**

Mark 13:24-37

"Watchman wanted," the ad in the paper read simply. "Watchman wanted."

Any one who regularly read the want ads in the daily paper would have noticed that this same ad with the same telephone number and the same person to call ran very often.

There's a story behind this. The story goes like this.

George Schmidt ran the personnel department of a large apartment complex.

This apartment complex promised its tenants that they would find living there to be the most secure living in town.

Security was important to tenants and prospective tenants.

It was a matter of the utmost necessity, therefore, that the apartment owners promise their tenants a security system that was foolproof. No strangers could or would be allowed in this apartment house!

Most aspects of the security system went well.

One thing did not go so well.

That was the job of the watchman at the front door of the apartment complex.

Mr. Schmidt had hired person after person for this crucial position in the security system.

The watchmen didn't watch very well. There was always some slipup. There were always people slipping through the front door and into the apartment building.

When Mr Schmidt hired a new watchman for the front door, he would give them a very stern lecture.

"No one is to be allowed to pass through this door unless they are authorized to be in the building. No one. Do you understand? To be sure that you're doing your job, I will be watching over you very carefully. I will come to check up on you several times during each shift. My visits will be unannounced. You will never know just when I might show up. If I ever catch you distracted, you will be fired on the spot. Do you understand?"

The new watchmen said they understood all right. And they took the job.

And the pressure just got unbearable. They knew that Mr. Schmidt could show up at any minute.

Watchman after watchman simply quit the job. They couldn't take the pressure.

They couldn't stand to be on watch for eight hours solid. "If I ever catch you distracted, you will be fired on the spot." Mr. Schmidt's words echoed in their ears.

Finally, they broke under pressure. They quit.

So Mr. Schmidt would advertise in the newspaper for another watchman.

It so happened that a young man, whose name was Derek, who was looking for work, saw the ad in the paper. "Watchman wanted," it said. He took down the number and called Mr. Schmidt. He went for the interview. He got the same lecture that every other watchman got. "If I ever catch you distracted, you will be fired on the spot," Mr. Schmidt told him just as he had told the others. Derek got the job.

And more than that, Derek kept the job. He was the best watchman that apartment complex ever had.

"How do you do it?" the apartment residents asked. "No one has ever lasted as long at this job as you have. They just couldn't live with the tension of not knowing when Mr. Schmidt might descend upon you?"

Derek heard this question so many times that he gave basically the same answer to everyone who asked it. His standard answer went something like this. "I guess the others focused too much on what they didn't know. I focus on what I do know. I know WHO is going to be checking on me. That's no surprise. It's dear old Mr. Schmidt.

Also, I know WHERE I'm supposed to be in order to do my job effectively. I'm supposed to be here at the front door. That's simple enough. And, I know WHAT I'm supposed to do here at the front door. I'm supposed to watch for those who make false statements about their presence here.

When you focus on what you know rather on than what you don't know, this job isn't all that difficult."

This little allegory of the watchman can help us live in to the reality of today's text from Mark 13. The whole of chapter 13 in Mark's Gospel has to do with the end times. The disciples ask about when. Jesus doesn't answer that question. Jesus' answer about the end of time is that no one except God knows that day.

Then Jesus proclaims to the disciples to be watchful.

Watch! This theme runs through all of Mark 13. Jesus' word goes like this. "You want to know when," he says. "But you can't know when."

"It is like a man going on a journey," Jesus says. "When he leaves home he puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the 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."

Jesus closes his address to the disciples with words that are obviously directed at you and me. "And what I say to you," Jesus says to the disciples, "I say to all: Watch."

Just one word. Watch! It isn't a very hard word to remember.

That one word pretty much summarizes the whole of Mark 13.

We don't know the day or the hour; we don't know when the final day of the Lord is to come.

So we are to watch! A whole chapter boils down to this one word: watch!

We know WHO it is we are watching for. The day is coming when we "...will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory."

We are watching for the return of Jesus. It is the Lord we have known here on earth who is coming again. Part of what is to happen at the end of time will be very familiar to us.

We will meet again the Lord we have walked with in this life. We know WHO we're waiting for.

And we know WHERE. We know where to wait for the Son of man. We know where we are to keep watch.

We are to keep watch at the story of Jesus.

Our Lord has promised to be with us wherever his story is told. Jesus has promised to be to be present with us through the sacrament of Holy Communion. Jesus has promised to be with us in and through the words of Scripture and the words people use to tell his story and where "two or three gather in my name."

We know WHERE to watch!

Good doorkeepers gather constantly around the story of Jesus. The Christ who meets us there will prepare us fully for the last day.

Finally, we know WHAT. We know what it is we are supposed to be doing as good doorkeepers.

We are to keep watch for those seeking to lead us astray into other paths.

We are to keep watch for those who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are wolves who will divide us and tear us apart.

We are to discern the truth. We are to keep only to Jesus. That's what good doorkeepers do.

"Watch!" That's Jesus' call to us today. We are to be vigilant in our watching for his coming because we do not know when he will return. But our focus should not be on what we don't know.. Let's focus on what we do know. We know WHO is coming. It is the Lord whom we know so very well who will come. There is nothing here to be afraid of.

We also know WHERE to watch for our Lord. We watch for him where he promises to be present for us. We watch for him through our faithful participation the sacrament of Holy Communion.

And we know WHAT we are to do. We are to cling only to Jesus and allow no others lead us astray.

May God bless each of us in our watch this Advent season! Amen.