



## SUNDAY SERMON

# Keep Watch and Pray On

---

After the past week we've had I think it would be fair and wise for all of us to start our time of reflection this morning with a few deep breaths. (Breath work for 5 inhalations).

I don't know about you guys, but in these waning summer days I was expecting things to slow down just a touch. To slow down enough so that people everywhere could catch their breath. For you and I to be able to lean back, turn off our devices and simply ignore the headlines of the day for just a short while before the weather cools and the calendar compels us once again to confront the professional, personal, and political headwinds that inevitably await us on.

Unfortunately for you and for me those dreamed of lazy, relaxing days of my imaginings have not come to be. The headlines of the most recent weeks are too damning for any one of us to ignore. Mass shootings, domestic terrorism, images of crying school children – these headlines are impossible to ignore, especially for those of us who profess to be Christians. We're not allowed to ignore them.

This morning's parable in the Gospel of Luke teaches us that God's plan is for all of us to keep watch and be vigilant. As people of faith we must be willing to withstand the dark of night so that we can ultimately bear witness when dawn breaks and light dispels the darkness. There is a gift in being on watch – you get to be amongst the first in line to welcome the light.

In Jesus' time a night watch was a standard practice – Jews and Gentiles broke the night into three different watches, whereas the Romans had one standard watch from around 6pm to 6am. Everyone, regardless of their community of origin, would've been very familiar with the concept of keeping watch at night as standard practice and a reasonable request of a master to a slave, or a general to a soldier. While to our modern ears this request may seem ego-driven or excessive, that would not have been the case to the early hearers. Someone had to be on watch to protect the household or city. What Jesus does is take this common concept and adds a metaphorical layer to this everyday practice. No longer is keeping watch merely a matter of civic or familial duty, now keeping watching contains a moral and spiritual dimension. Jesus is urging all people to keep watch for God. To be ready to welcome and receive the light of God when it comes. In this request is also an admonition to be on guard for those things that will try to separate us from God and the ways of God.

*continued*

### DATE

Pentecost 9  
Sunday, August 11, 2019

### PREACHER

The Rev. Amy Molina-Moore

**St. Columba's**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

---

St. Columba's is a welcoming Christian community that seeks to be open in spirit, deep in faith, rich in worship, active in service.

4201 Albemarle Street NW ■ Washington, DC 20016 ■ 202-363-4119 ■ [Columba.org](http://Columba.org)

And so we keep watch, and as we watch we can't help but see much that disturbs.

Being disturbed by the world is not new. In fact, we're in pretty excellent company when it comes to being disturbed by the brutality that humans are capable of. None other than God Almighty has expressed disgust and horror at the injustice of the world. That's what we're getting this morning from the prophet Isaiah. God has had it with the state of humanity! In particular God is just fed up with the religious folks who love the ritual but ignore the heart of the faith. "Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them." The Hebrews developed these elaborate festivals, sacrifices and feasts to make God happy and God is saying very clearly through the prophet Isaiah – I don't care about any of these things! If you don't follow the most basic of my teachings which is to Love God and Love Neighbor than there is no appeasing Yahweh.

Rather than just express displeasure, God uses the occasion of this righteous anger to redirect the faithful and once again offer very clear instructions for how to make things right... cause maybe, just maybe 10 commandments were just too tricky. So God proposes a fresh start. Verse 16 reads "Wash Yourselves: make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." We find in these words God taking the time to explain the grand plan. There's no secret - to love God and make God happy is to be one who loves those who God loves. To be faithful to divine love is to rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan and plead on behalf of the widow. God is beseeching us to stop doing evil and focus our energies instead on learning to do the good.

For many of us this will hopefully result in some direct action or mobilization of time, talent and resources to help our brothers and sisters who find themselves in the oppressed, orphan or widow category these days. There is no doubt that I think actions are important and necessary, but some of us are under the impression that God's instruction means that God has now left the building and human agency alone is what will ultimately bring about the world that God burns with passion for. Any reduction of the problems of the world to a matter of our individual agency is misguided. The call for justice is totalizing – it requires all of us and our collective reliance on the divine. The only way that we are going to overcome radical injustice, hatred, fear and anger is together and with a whole lot of prayer. (Tell the Story of John's arm and my experience of needing the community to pray for me.)