

At the witnessing workshop class last Sunday night I was accused of being a pouncer. A class member was describing what may keep people away from the church. They are afraid that as soon as they make any commitment to the church, that someone will pounce upon them with responsibilities. "Will you join a circle, will you run for office, sing in the choir, teach a class, clean up around the church." Am I a pouncer, I asked. Their nodding smiles told me that chief of pouncers am I. This morning I want to explain to you all why.

"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 sevant 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. Many have not thought much about God. They have not shared the pain of sisters and brothers in their hours of need. 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, so hard for them to to know how to trust in God.

That is why I am a pouncer. I want you as ready as you can be for what life will certainly throw at you. Someday you are going to be the

uy, you know, the one you thought it always happened to. When that comes I want for each of you a foundation strong, solid as a rock.

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.

Watch. That very night Jesus would ask his disciples to watch with him while he prayed in the garden of Gethesamne. They would learn about God and themselves for their own hour of praying, Father, let this cup of suffering pass from me.

Watch. At midnight we see our Lord betrayed by a kiss. We see tht he did not lift up a sword in revenge.

Watch. At cockcrow we witness Peter being tempted to deny Jesus, his failure, his anguished sorrow.

Watch. In the morning we see Jesus on trial, unafraid to speak the truth, ready to endure death rather than turn from his father's will.

Watch. Beginning at noon, we witness our Lord suffering and dying, the light of God's presence disappearing diappearing as his world turned to darkness.

Watch. A new day, a new morning. The sun shines once more for God has been faithful. Jesus is alive. Faith and hope in God were not diappointed.

I am a pouncer, first of all, because I want more and more people to watch. I want you to know Jesus' story, to study it, to hear it , to sing it, to act it out. I want each of you to watch Jesus in every way possible. So that when Jesus story or Peter's story becomes your story that you will know and trust that even when the sky is black and there is

voice from heaven that God will not leave you. Even when your sin is beyond excuse, when there is no deliverance from the cross, God has the power to bring a new day.

I am a pouncer because I want you to be with each other. I want you to have times and places and trust in each other to hear another's story. Most all of you have stories to tell, of suffering, pain, disappointment, death, and how in and through it all God has given life.

I am a pouncer because I want you all to let go, to practice letting go of your time, your possessions. My co-pastor in North Dakota, Peter Humlie said, we do not give to needs, rather we need to give. The poor people of this world do not need your money nearly so much as you need to learn to let go of your money. God will provide is easy to say. But those who have tested God's providing by their giving are far more prepared when hard times come. They have learned to lean on God, and not on their wealth.

I am a pouncer because I want you to talk to the homeless, to visit the sick, to listen to the witness of the dying. I want you to hear the testimonies that I hear, how God provides faith and hope. You won't be so afraid.

All of this is part of watching. Taking heed. Preparing. This is the reason that we are called together to be the church. Not to build buildings and pass the time, but that we might grow in faith, and in hope and in love.

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