

The Feelings of the Watchman – a Devotional by Rev. Keith Cobb

As in each epoch there are those distinct dangers unique to the period, so are there the ways to watch for them, and those who are called upon to do so.

These are the watchmen, and they sound trumpets of one sort or another, and these trumpets have different names. But the watchmen are in each case the warners, and they are usually on walls on the edges of the camps and are in one way or another separated from the encamped, those otherwise engaged walled-in inhabitants who are the tent-dwellers.

Often, the dangers are far, far away and only the watchman sees and suspects, and he wonders if the danger is really coming toward his camp and if he should sound the trumpet, or wait; he doesn't have anyone near enough to him to confer with, and the decisions he makes affect people one way or another, and he feels the weight of that reality.

And from the vantage point of the wall, he can see other, more subtle dangers – those that are already in the camp, dangers that made it through the gate because they seemed tame and safe enough, and the people wanted it in the camp, and maybe a less-discerning watchman wanted the camp-dwellers to have the joy of outside things, or maybe he himself didn't realize the threat. Whatever, the watchman who looks out into the dark looks back to the feebly lit camp often, and all too often that internal alarm in him warns about internal danger, and the nagging ache to be true to his duty but not disruptive to his kinsmen give him moments of angst and uncertainty, but he will blow his trumpet like the referee his whistle when he must – because he must – and there are always those who don't like it when he does that.

As one might guess, the watchman doesn't rest like the tent-dwellers, and the wall isn't for sleeping anyway. He is on the edge of the darkness and the edge of the light; he is perched between earth and sky; he is with the tent-dwellers, but alone; he is up when they are not, and he is not able to always see but he is always looking.

He often puts the trumpet to his mouth and doesn't blow, and sometimes he blows when it was only a harmless caravan passing nearby, and the camp wonders about their watchman, but usually not as often as the watchman wonders about himself. But he knows to blow with certainty anyway, because the uncertain trumpet surely annoys, but worse, it weakens resolve and diminishes urgency and devalues the trumpet, so when he blows, he seems real sure even when he isn't, but no one knows that but the watchman.

Not that the campers aren't annoyed with the trumpets when they sound forth with certainty; the camp likes its repose, and it dreads move and it loathes being disturbed out of sleep. People inside the camp throw rocks at the watchman when they are awakened; they like their sleep. Sometimes rocks are being hurled on one side of the wall while flaming arrows are coming toward him from outside the wall, and so the watchman is vulnerable, and often wants to throw down the trumpet and come down from the wall and hide in a tent.

But then, there is the trumpet, the trumpet that somehow became HIS trumpet. Maybe it was given to him, or maybe he found it, or maybe it was passed on to him, but it's his now. He knows its sounds and its capacity, and has been around those who play it for entertainment to the delight of the tent-dwellers. He remembers those who took their trumpets apart and explained how they worked and named the pieces with names only trumpet-specialists knew, and that was fun, but he couldn't always remember the names, and he knew the wall wasn't the place to be taking the trumpet apart, and neither was it the place to show off his skill.

Some trumpeters were really good at lullabies, and tent-dwellers love lullabies when it's dark, and so they really like those trumpeters – that is, unless they are suddenly awaked to sounds of battering rams; their feelings toward trumpets and watchman change when lusty, bearded barbarians are screaming at the gate wanting the stuff belonging to the tent-dwellers.

Those watchmen who stay on the wall to watch and not entertain, though, often put the trumpet to their mouths and never blow, but they can hear the sounds in their head – sounds of beauty instead of blaring alarm, and the music is so beautiful they long for the pasture-lands and wish they had flutes instead of trumpets and meadows instead of walls, and they dream of the day, the end of the dark, and the delight of uninterrupted song. And sometimes they wish they were in a band with other musicians and people would applaud with delight as the harmony of thoughtful melody settles into their appreciative hearts.

But the watchman knows the travelers in the dark are drawn to the camp, and he knows their desires, and that the imaginations of these dark-dwellers are as great as their lust, and that they dream of treasures behind the walls and long to take it for themselves; it's in their nature. Camps are, after all, conspicuous, and there is treasure within, and the walls betray that fact.

So the watchman dutifully stands on those walls that tell of treasures and he searches the darkness and glances back to the dimly lit camp, and he clutches his trumpet, and forgets his scars, and waits, and watches for day, the pull of the heavenly sky holding him fast, the stars above him beaming with sufficient light to keep him longing inwardly while gazing outwardly.