

**CONTEXT FOR THE WATCH**

1. We came upon the activity of the watch through our study and reading of the monastics back in the fall. We have lived with it since, not knowing how to get it out or how to relate it, which is what we now have to decide. We discovered it first in Room E during the fast as a step toward a practical exercise that enabled us to participate in the state of being called poverty. We raised the question of corporate discipline and were looking for an exercise in obedience. From the descriptions of the vigils and night watches that I had read, it seemed that they had their roots in the state of being we call obedience. Since these exercises have come down to us from ancient times, we are not creating something new, but are simply transforming an ancient heritage.

2. This summer we are experimenting with four symbols of our corporate discipline. First the cross of chastity, then the watch for obedience, the fast for poverty, and the cotillion ball as our final celebration. These correlate to the spirit motifs of the mystery of the cross, the tension in freedom and obedience, uncircumscribed responsibility, and ecstatic expression of happiness.

3. These are, however, practical activities which enable all of us to travel the distance of interior discipline in our post-modern world much like the Orthodox monks who take to the desert for ten years. All of these have deep origins in the Eastern church. We are beginning the building of practical dialogue points with our ancient traditions.

4. Let me describe a night watch and see if you can get a feel after what was going on there. (When you do this in the middle of the night, of course, it lends itself to this kind of setup.) The darkness, or standing in the darkness is an experience that we have all had, and the middle of the night only deepens that experience. The posture of watching in the dark is itself a contradiction -- you can't see in the dark. But what you are doing is watching in the dark. Do you begin to get some idea of the contradiction or the paradox that you are dealing with?

5. The stillness of the night is one theme. Everything is literally stilled to the point of appearing stopped. That is, if you looked at any city or any natural scene at night--the stars, the trees, the water---it is standing still. The quietness of the night is another theme. That is just the way life is. Christian poetry likens it to the time in the tomb. The turmoil of the day has died away and everything is still. But if you look again, you realize that things have not stopped; things are really not at rest. You see that life is still going on in the middle of the night, and now all is vibrating or pulsating. It is a different kind of action. Things are alive; they look dead. but that is not the case.

6. If you look around, the Church is on watch all through the night. You remember the night-time watch of the bridegroom in the scripture. Think of the night vigils of the early Christians in the catacombs. This goes back before the canonical hours came into being in the form that we have them. The Church insists that the night is not just for sleep. The night is a symbol of life on the earth. We are like the virgins in the parable who went to wait for the Bridegroom. About midnight, the Church said, there comes a call. And the call is, "Look! here comes the Bridegroom! And what you do at that point is to go out and meet Him. Therefore, you must always keep watch because it seems to be somewhat difficult to know exactly when He is coming. But what you are to watch for is that coming that hour in which the Son of Man comes.

7. Try this kind of analogy. You remember when we talked about fasting? An animal is on a twenty-four hour feast. What it means to be an animal is to be eating all the time, to be procuring food

most of the time. If you are a good cow, you chew your cud all the time. Then man, with fire and tools, broken the all-day feast. That humanness was injected at that point. Now you spend most of your day fasting, with some twenty-two hours not taken up with the job of procuring. But contingency in the fast is not simply your hunger, your natural contingency. Fasting has to do with spiritual contingency. That is, you and I are called in those other twenty-two hours to feast in the spirit. What we are about in those hours is spirit reality. We fast in order to return to the feast--the feast of the spirit.

8. Now flip that. I want to try this kind of analogy. The fasting and feasting, I think, correlate to watching and waking. I looked up the word wake. This is an old word for me, and it means something like a path or a trail. A walk is not unrelated--walking on the trail, or prowling. Animals are on a twenty-four hour continual walk. They are always prowling, always active, always moving about. They are always on the trail. Now man, again with the invention of tools and symbols, also broke the all-day walk or the all-day wake, if you will, with watching. Humanness was invented when somebody decided that we would stop and put somebody on security or watch, and the rest of us would sit down around the campfire and have a spirit conversation. Something like that. We broke the natural habit.

9. But you do not watch for natural contingency only. Today, you and I do not experience our contingency in the natural dangers, but in the spiritual dangers. When we participate in watching, we are, as the poetry of the New Testament puts it, watching for the Second Coming. This is the metaphor of the spirit. In order to awake through prayer, we watch for the spirit. Therefore, watching really has nothing to do with sleeping, just as fasting, in the first instance, has nothing to do with eating. Yet those images are helpful clues.

10. We ran across two shining examples which I think we have used before. One is the image of the cobra and its poise and deliberation -- the positioning and the pause before it strikes. The other one we ran across in describing the Sumo wrestling matches of the East. In the Sumo wrestling match there is a ritual preceding and during the match which is just as important as actually throwing your opponent. There are two big hulks of men who are not what you would call agile wrestlers. But that is not the point. The point is that each literally stands before the other with an intense kind of concentration, watching for the moment when the other's concentration falters. That is the moment to throw him. Then it is all over, and everybody goes home. And the most important part is the watching of the watching that is going on.

11. It is like this. When you are quiet and calm internally, then the spirit suffering is the greatest. That is just the way it is. When you see the possibility that we have as the Movement across the globe, that will stun you, and beneath that is the greatest pain that we have: the pain of staring that in the face. But you have to be careful here because when you are watching you sometimes see mirages. You have to be careful that you see out there. You have probably read about spirit suffering. I am not talking about external suffering at all. The mirage lies in pushing the agony to the eternal. You say that when you were given the task of building the tactics for the next twenty years, the problem is in those strategies and tactics. No, the problem is not strategies and tactics. The problem is in the area of the spirit.

12. Let me explain that in this way. The other metaphor in the New Testament is about the thief coming in the middle of the night. What you have to watch out for is the thief who will steal. The fact of the matter is that the thief always comes unsuspecting, or, as we would say, tangentially. But talking about the thief in actuality is always talking about you. It is not that you have some super-thief that has a big plot. You have to decide to watch for the thief because the thief always has a possibility of slipping in and stealing, and it is just easier at night.

13. The thief represents the suffering of mankind. He represents man--most of all, perhaps, the fat lady who has never had a chance to be human. And the goal of the thief is to steal life--to steal life from you and from what is going on. The poverty of the fat lady makes her a thief ontologically in that she has to

grab life, she has to get life from you. Well, when you see this suffering going on--when you see your colleague in this case, or anybody--your response is, "Well, I wish we could give him some life. If we get these strategies and tactics all worked out, everything will be all right for the fat lady." You have to get beyond that particular into the transparent, and walk with the suffering of mankind.

14. Watching is always related to the suffering of mankind. But it is also related to the occasion of a particular, such as the beginning of Summer '72. You watch at the occasion of some particular event, but you are always watching for the eternal. I think this is like fasting "over" and "about" something. But it is always at some occasion, and, again out of the New Testament, it is always watching for the Second Coming. As you are watching for the Second Coming, your own particular trials and tribulations are revealed. What you have finally discovered is no external problem but your very own trial and tribulation.

15. What you watch for is the fact that you are the guy who has closed his eyes to the quivering and pulsating life that is all about you. You realize that you are blinder than most people and the fear that overwhelms you is that you may not make it through the next night of building the strategies and tactics. Watching and waking reveals that from birth your eyes literally have been closed to what has been going on. It is experiencing yourself as just blind. It is the rhythm of watching and waking over and over again. Every experience, in one sense, has been illusion and waking up to a new reality. But any suffering and any pain that is brought to you is never for your own sake, or for the glory in it. It is for the sake of the Mystery. Suffering is not given to you for your own sake, but is given to you for the sake of history. And this is what you realize in the watch. If you do not keep the lamps lighted, history is going down the drain. You realize that you must keep the lamps lighted.

16. The watch in the New Testament is probably best illustrated by Jesus' night in Gethsemane. This is the watch in the broad sense of the term. It is divided into three parts in which he goes back three times. I did not realize this, but it is in the New Testament, and I interpret it to mean that you have to watch for three hours. It doesn't say 180 minutes, you understand, but the first hour is the one in which he literally says, "Let this hour pass. If I could get out of having to do this, in this hour, it would be all right." In other words, there is the struggle of "take this cup away from me" in that first hour. Then he comes down and finds the disciples asleep. That is, they have not been struggling with what is obviously called for. And he says something like, "The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." And he goes back for a second time. When he comes down and finds them asleep again, he takes a little different attitude and just says something like, "Go ahead and take your rest; I have got to go on." He just bolts on by them and meets Judas coming up the hill. And then a little later in the passage, after Judas points him out and there is a bit of a row, the high priest or someone asks him whether he is Jesus of Nazareth, and the last words he speaks in the chapter are, "I am the man." I am the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming on clouds of Heaven." At this point they all fall down according to one of the gospels. But they get back up and ask him again and then proceed to the trial.

17. I talk about it this way: the watching flushes the real tempter out into the open. It takes all of one's struggles and refocuses them before the Lord. And in this analogy the betrayer is not Judas, it is not the disciples copping out; nor even one's own failure to decide. The only betrayal is your refusal to be the Son of Man. You have, therefore, only one temptation, and all the others you can handle with one hand tied behind your back. The only struggle is over being the Son of Man.

18. Watching has therefore to do with the contingency of the tomb. The ritual of the watch exposes the awareness of your tomb. You would have no problem doing something in history if it were not for the fact that the grave holds you accountable for what you have to do. Sometimes, for example, you think you can go ahead and get things done, except for the fact that you have to rest six or seven hours a day. In the watch you are aware of the tomb in that sense. Just as fasting relativizes time, I think that watching relativizes your sense of situation or relationships in such a way that you have to come to terms with your

death, what you are going to do. You realize that you can go ahead and act. What you come over against is the sin of inadvertence; the sin of omission becomes clear. It is the sin of unawakening. It is the sin of inattention before that which you have overlooked and which you have not paid attention to. And that is a terrifying realization because it comes to you as having missed the moment of life. Therefore, the acting that is required is the acting out of attentiveness, of mission. Maybe it is suffering as we were talking about it earlier.

19. It has been exciting to look back into history and to relate it to where we are now. We talk about life as consciousness of consciousness. In the watch, you come up against the bare fact of life itself, and therefore up against the possibility of the return or the wake. This is like the possibility of the feast in fasting, the possibility of returning to walk in life. And the way the Church has done this in with processions or parades--the act parading. I never thought that the Easter parade could mean anything, but now I think that it is related to a festival, which may be a better word. That is, after a watch you have a festival, a celebration, literally a holiday, or a holy day. There is merriment; there is gaiety; there is mirth. It is the same as our feast, and maybe this will help us understand the feast better. It is ecstasy because that day now becomes holy for you. You see that day in the total plan of your destiny. You see the purpose of that day. You see your action in that day in the total plan of the salvation or redemption of the world. And therefore, ecstasy becomes a genuine possibility.

Richard Loudermilk

THE WATCH OF THE GREAT TURN

ON BEHALF OF  
ALL MEN

CORPORATENESS		HISTORICAL		EXPERIENTIAL		SCRIPTURAL	
CORPORATE VOWS	Poverty	WATCH AND WAKE	Path or Trail	DESCRIPTION OF WATCH	JESUS IN GETHESEMANE	Great Watch	Let This Cup Pass Spirit Willing Flesh Weak
	Chastity		Animals Prowl 24 Hours Invention of Watch	Night is Calm But Man is Anxious Watching in Dark?		"I have to go on"	
	Obedience		Natural, Habit Broken	Now Can See; Paradox		Tempor Exposed	
	Mission		Sign of Life	Night Appears Still		Refocus Struggle	
PARTICULAR ENGAGEMENT	Concrete Situation	CHURCH ON WATCH	Night Not just for Sleep	THINGS ARE ALIVE	SON OF MAN	Own Refusal	One Temptation
	Intruding Demand		Always Keep Watch				
	Actual Possibility		Early Church in Catacombs				
	Temporal Occasion		Watch for the Eternal				
INNER SUFFERING	Own Trial	DANGER IN SPIRITUAL	Watch for the Moment eg. Cobra & Sumo Wrestler	YOU ARE BLIND	EXPOSES THE TOMBS	Holds Accountable	Terms of Your Death
	Sin of Advertance For History		Lest One Falters			Sins of Omission	Final Obedience
	Keep Vigilant		Comes in Night-Steals			Return To Life	Processional or Parade
	Literal Sign	WATCH FOR THIEF	Unsuspecting You	AT AND FOR	POSSIBILITY OF RETURN	Wake and Festival	Your Action in Total Plan
EXTERNAL INDEX	Travel Distance		Response To the Sufferer				
	Points Beyond		Walk With SufferingManki				
	Means of Grace						