Being a watchman or watchwoman is a heavy responsibility. This person is responsible for
the safety and wellbeing of a whole community and must keep eyes and ears finely tuned to
any sight or sound that signals danger. On top of that the watchman is powerless; he or she
can warn the community of danger but has little power to make people heed the warning.
Just think of Dr. Fauchi.

This morning's first reading describes the God of Israel calling Ezekiel to this unenviable
job, and our gospel passage calls all of us Christians to the same duty. In both instances
those called are charged with calling out forces and behaviors that tear communities apart.
Ezekiel calls them "wickedness." Matthew's Jesus calls them "wrongs." (The earliest texts of
this gospel don't have the words "against you," so we can assume that Jesus is talking about
forces and behaviors that go beyond personal disputes and are destructive of the common
good, although personal disputes can certainly turn into communal disputes. )

Matthew is probably writing for a Jewish community that is transitioning into a Christian
one, and the Jesus of Matthew orders a protocol for handling wrongdoing that is taken
from Jewish law. It's meant to help a person who has offended in some way to turn back
from behavior that endangers self and community. First the person who experiences or
notices the offense speaks privately to the one who is out of line. This spares that person
from public humiliation and shame. If that does not remedy the situation, witnesses are
brought in. This serves as a check on the confrontation. Perhaps the confronter has read
the situation wrongly; perhaps the confronter is offloading anger on someone else; perhaps
they want to make themselves feel superior by putting someone down; perhaps they don't
recognize that their opinion of what's right or wrong is not shared by everybody; or they're
projecting their own shortcomings on another person; (Jesus had good advice on that one:
remove the beam from your eye before you try to remove the speck from somebody else's
eye.)

The last step, ostracizing the person who refuses to change seems out of character for the
Jesus who, in this very same Chapter 18, talked compassionately about searching for the lost
sheep and condemned the merciless servant who was forgiven a huge debt but wouldn't
forgive the small debt of another.
St. Paul tells us to "Owe no debt to anyone except the debt that binds us to love one another." Love can lead confronters to awareness of the flaws in their judgements and perceptions. Love can lead the confronted to take a look at the confrontation and see what truth there is in it without automatically going on the defensive.

So, how can we best fulfill our calling to be watchmen, as communities, as cities, as nations, are broken apart by racism and the planet and its people, especially the poorest, are impacted when the community of life is torn apart by greed and consumerism?

Today there are many ways that people are raising their voices against evils, against wrongs and engaging in actions of many sorts. There are many ways to join them, and we can choose them according to our abilities and our passions.

For example, Today is the first Sunday of The Season of Creation which goes from Sept.1 to Oct. 4.
It's a time to, "Join our sisters and brothers in the ecumenical family in prayer and action for our common home... With so much injustice around us, now is the time for Christians everywhere to come together to show the world how to love each other and creation." *
This is a strong clarion call, but it is addressed to people around the world who are exhausted, anxious, depressed, struggling in the perfect storm of a pandemic, racism and climate change. I don't know how relevant this is, but a couple of years ago I came across an article in the wonderful *Sun* magazine by Krista Brenner, a woman whose husband of fourteen years is a devout Muslim from Libya. She writes about her resentment when her husband withdraws from her during Ramadan into a contemplative state. I think it can speak to all of us who feel too exhausted to do one more thing and resent that life is not what we think it should be:

"During Ramadan, when he turns inward and has less to offer me, I feel indignant. I want to make a scene. I want to speak to whoever is in charge, to demand what I think was promised me when I entered this marriage. But now I wonder: Is love an endless feast or is it what people manage to serve each other when the cupboard is bare?"

Perhaps this is the time for us to take a look at our cupboards to see if there is anything there, however sparse, that we can put to use in the service of paying the debt of love.

* https://seasonofcreation.org/about