

July 8 – Pentecost +7

Ezekiel 2:1-7

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel+2:1-7>

Mark 6:1-13

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Whenever we read from the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, it's always important to place things in their context. Inasmuch as Ezekiel is a major prophet, and the book bearing his name has many lessons for us today, it's important to recognize that these words, this text, are from a particular prophet during a specific time in Israel's history. It describes the hard days leading up to the Babylonian exile of Israel,<sup>1</sup> but, since this text is included in our scriptures, we can still read its message even if the prophet's warning to be faithful might not seem as relevant to us as its original listeners.<sup>2</sup>

You know something's significant when you read: "Thus says the Lord GOD." Here we read God commissioning Ezekiel to proclaim God's words to the Israelites. Whether they hear or refuse to hear, they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. God tells Ezekiel to speak the words God gives to him, whether or not they hear. Isn't that interesting? Go speak to them – even if they don't listen to you, since they're a stubborn bunch, but go speak anyway and if they hear they hear, if they don't they don't.

I don't think this is apathy on God's part. I think it's a realization that there's only so much you can do, but you're still willing to do it. God can't, or won't, make people do anything they don't want to do, but God still finds a way to speak to people. Ezekiel will speak as God's mouthpiece, whether or not the people choose to listen to God's voice.

I think our task as Christians, not only preachers but everyone, our task is to bear witness, to point to Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> To point to Jesus Christ whether people hear or refuse to hear. That doesn't mean beating people over the head with a Bible, or guiltning them into coming to church, it means living a Christ-like life, and letting our words and actions bear witness to God regardless of whether or not people see God working through us. The main thing for us is to continue to be faithful, to let our lives bear witness and leave it to people to make up their own minds.

If we shift from the Ezekiel reading to the gospel, we see that bearing witness to God is just what Jesus does, even if it doesn't mean everyone follows Him. I think it's worth noticing that even Jesus – who was constantly pointing to God in word and action – even Jesus, couldn't get the people of Nazareth to accept Him. There are always going to be people we reach, and people we don't reach, but again the point is to keep the faith, to continue bearing witness. Jesus' ministry has already been successful in nearby synagogues, like Capernaum, and you would expect similar positive results at Nazareth as well.<sup>4</sup> But that's not what happens, and it

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1324](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1324) *Commentary on Mark 6:1-13, Powery*

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1303](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1303) *Commentary on Ezekiel 2:1-5,*

Fred Gaiser

<sup>3</sup> Gaiser

<sup>4</sup> Powery

makes one wonder why. What was it about the people of Nazareth that prevented them from seeing Jesus the way others did?

Maybe it was because of the way they identified Him – not as a prophet, or teacher, definitely not as the Messiah or Son of God. They actually mock Jesus when they ask where He gets His power and wisdom from. Their description of him as "the carpenter," as a common tradesperson is like a jab to say He's not that well educated to have true wisdom. But when they identify Jesus as "the son of Mary," they're ignoring any mention of a father figure<sup>5</sup> - basically alluding that He's an illegitimate child. So not only are they blind to seeing Jesus for who He really is, not only are these people failing to see how Jesus is pointing to God, they're actually insulting Jesus as well.

This story might seem out of sorts with the wider gospel, but I think it actually helps to give a better sense of Jesus' ministry and our own as well. Like Jesus, one can bear witness to God in what they say and do, but you can't control how people will react or respond to that witness. Jesus doesn't go on to prove to the people why they should reconsider who they think He is – He just heals a few sick people and moves on, prevented from doing something more attention grabbing.

But then there's a transition. Jesus commissions His disciples to go into the villages as they begin their ministries. And I think it was so important for them to realize that ministry isn't always successful, ministry isn't always without its share of challenges and obstacles, BUT it is something they are invited to partner with God in doing. Just as Jesus invited the disciples into ministry, God invites each and all of us – both individually and collectively as a congregation – to partner with God in God's ministry and mission for the world. And I think, if we interpret Ezekiel correctly, we're called to do this regardless of the outcome of our testimony. Again, the main thing is to let our lives bear witness to God and it's up to people how they respond but it's so important to recognize this invitation to partner with God before responding.

God *shares* God's ministry of reconciliation and healing with us, which means that each and every day we have before us the opportunity to be channels of grace and mercy to people and a world desperately in need of it.<sup>6</sup> I've probably referenced a prayer by Saint Teresa of Avila who said, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless His people."

It might sound controversial to present the idea that God is powerless or unable to do something without our help, and involvement but this isn't a judgment about God's power; rather it is about our willingness to be a vessel and conduit for God's love and healing in our lives and in the lives of our neighbours.<sup>7</sup>

If we read the gospel this way, this passage sets the stage for making sense of both parts as well. Jesus, having been rejected at His hometown, now equips and commissions His disciples to carry on His ministry. They are partners in ministry in a way they have not been up to this point in

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<sup>5</sup> Powery

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2018/07/pentecost-7-b-gods-partners/> David Lose (DJL)

<sup>7</sup> DJL

Mark's gospel. Maybe we've already begun to think this, and maybe not, but I encourage you to consider yourself as a partner in God's ministry. Think about yourself as a disciple, a follower of Christ, called to bear witness to God in all that you do. To be part of God's ministry of wholeness, mercy, love, and grace.

If we think of our faith lives this way, maybe it helps us realize that our actions really do matter. That our little deeds of kindness are important in the grand scheme. Our actions are a response to God's holy invitation. God has chosen you, not only for salvation but also for purposeful, consequential lives here and now, and that each day we have a choice between resisting God's activity or partnering with God's intent and action to bless and care for God's world.

All of our acts of kindness and compassion are holy actions, and our moments of unkindness or indifference tragic. What we do matters, and once again this week God equips and commissions us to be agents of grace.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps we are not commissioned in the exact same way that Ezekiel was, to speak God's words to a stubborn people before their exile, but perhaps we are similar to Ezekiel in the sense that we are called to be God's mouth, and hands, and eyes, God's partners in ministry. We are definitely not Jesus, but might we not still be willing to bear witness in our home communities, or present ones, regardless of how others choose to see us...whether God is clearly seen or less obviously.

The choice is ours. There is an invitation to partner with God in ministry, to bear witness in small ways and big ways, even if our words and actions don't have the response or success we had hoped for. (*ways like our BBQ at the Pines; baking for people, visiting them when they're sick*)

While we might struggle at times to sense God's grace, please know that you make a difference in this world. Sometimes we're sharing that grace and don't even recognize it. And I want you to know how grateful I am for your efforts. So don't be discouraged. Remember that everyday acts of kindness that can be so ordinary as to be easily overlooked are truly extraordinary in the difference they make as tiny pieces in God's ministry of wholeness and love for the world. God does see you and your actions. May God bless you to be a blessing to others.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> DJL

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