

This Sunday's texts:

Ezekiel 2:1-5

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Mark 6:1-13

With or Without Respect

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The holy gospel for this Sunday comes to us from the gospel of Mark, the 6th chapter:

Jesus left that part of the country and returned with his disciples to Nazareth, his hometown. The next Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. They asked, "Where did he get all this wisdom and the power to perform such miracles?" Then they scoffed, "He's just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us." They were deeply offended and refuse to believe in him. Then Jesus told them, "A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family." And because of their unbelief, he couldn't do any miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then Jesus went from village to village, teaching people. And he called his twelve disciples together and began sending them out two by two, giving them authority to cast out evil spirits. He told them to take nothing for their journey except a walking stick - no food, no traveler's bag, no money. He allowed them to wear sandals, but not to take a change of clothes. "Wherever you go," he said, "stay in the same house until you leave the town. But if any place refuses to welcome you or listen to you, shake its dust from your feet as you leave to show that you have abandoned those people to their fate." So the disciples went out, telling everyone they met to repent of

their sins and turn to God. And they cast out many demons, and healed many sick, people anointing them with olive oil.

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we give you thanks this day for those who have invited us to worship, for those who have shared with us the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus, and we pray that as we worship this day, we would hear and know and be motivated to embrace others with your love and to know that embrace for ourselves. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The texts for this Sunday are really interesting. There are many peculiarities in them and I won't go over all of them, but some of them just sort of caught me. From the first lesson from the Old Testament, it's clear that the people of Israel both then and prior have been rebellious and stubborn and resisted God's prophet's messages and what God has sought to say to them. And it's pretty clear even that Ezekiel is fully aware of this because the text starts with this amazing word. "'Stand up, son of man,' said the voice. 'I want to speak with you.'" Then listen to verse two. "The Spirit came into me as he spoke, and he set me on my feet."¹ Ezekiel wasn't even going to up, but God says up you go.

There's this sense that God will not be thwarted, that he will find a way and he will empower a people to stand for him, to share his word with others, even if they don't apparently want to hear it. I know there are times in my life when I've chosen to remain quiet because of an assumption, whether right or wrong, that I've made that others don't want to hear about Jesus, don't want to hear about what I believe, or what the Bible teaches. So this is a powerful word, that even though Ezekiel isn't jumping to the opportunity, the spirit raises him up and allows him the privilege of being the spokesperson for God, even to a rebellious people.

¹ Ezekiel 2:1-2

It's important for us to see in this the character of God. God loves his people, whether they're acting badly or not, whether they're resisting him and being stubborn or not. He's going to speak truth to them and that truth is he wants a relationship with his people. And he's going to come to them. He's going to come to us. And he's going to use his people to be his voice and to express the love and the care and the truth about who he is. The text says:

“I am sending you to say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says!’ And whether they listen or refuse to listen - for remember, they are rebels - at least they will know they have had a prophet among them.”²

At least they will know that they've heard from God.

It's hard to imagine hearing from God and yet resisting him. But then again, we kind of do that all the time. We put our desires, our will, our assumptions ahead of what the scripture teaches us, ahead of what God shares with us through his word and his people. We assume that we know and that we understand what's happening. Even though when we look around, as long as we're not being asked to do something else, we readily admit that we don't know what's coming next, that we don't know exactly what's happening, and that our viewpoint is, in fact, very restricted, very narrow.

And so God comes and he speaks. He speaks through his word. He speaks through his people. He speaks through his prophet. And he gives us an opportunity to yield our lives to the truth, to yield our lives to his will and desires for us. And I'll remind you. Even though these are a rebellious people, even though we are a rebellious people, even though we often encounter in our lives people who want nothing to do with God, God is good. And he loves us and he loves

² Ezekiel 2:4-5

them and we have the enormous privilege of letting them know that truth. It may have been that Ezekiel didn't feel particularly worthy, but God stands them up and puts words in his mouth, and makes him an instrument of God.

Let's not lose sight of what else is in our text for today. Because in our gospel text for today, Jesus himself shows up in Nazareth and is rejected. It's a tragic story and yet so true. I can truly imagine some of the people that knew me when I was younger, now learning that I'm a pastor, going "Are you kidding me!? Him??" And in truth, I said that about myself.

And that's what happens in Nazareth. Jesus shows up. The text tells us that many who heard him were amazed. They were astonished. In truth, we see that over and over again in other places in scripture. The people that see what Jesus does, who hear what Jesus says are astounded by his wisdom, amazed by the power of God that is at work through him to bring healing and freedom to people. But then it shifts. You see the truth of the authority of Jesus in both word and deed is that we need to submit to it. We need to submit to that authority. I'm pretty sure what happens in Nazareth is they see Jesus as either an equal or an inferior because, after all, he's only the carpenter's son. He's a blue-collar guy. They're not going to submit to him as their rabbi. They're not going to allow him to be superior. So they get offended by his authority because that authority requires submission.

We're going to hear later that as Jesus sends out his apostles, his disciples that they preach a word of repentance. In the truth that Jesus preaches is a recognition of the fact that we do fall short, that we are sinners, and that we are *dependent* upon God's grace for forgiveness and redemption. We don't get love because we deserve to be loved. We are loved

because of who God is. The grace he gives he gives out of his will and his goodness, not our own.

So they criticized Jesus and they refused to submit. They refused to trust in him, that is, to believe in him. The text even tells us that they then scoff at him. They belittle him by acknowledging that he comes from the family of Mary. There may even be a suggestion here that they knew that Jesus was born to Mary before Mary and Joseph were married and they're trying to put him down.

Have you ever been put down? Ridiculed? Belittled? Because I know I have and I haven't responded very well. To be honest, most of the time it just hurts so much that I sort of make like a dog, tail between the legs, and scurry away. It's not that I fight for myself. It's that I just, I just walk away. Maybe that's not so bad. Maybe it's good not to fight. Maybe that's what Jesus meant when he told his disciples that if you go into a town and they don't accept you, just shake the dust off your feet and move on. I want to think that that's because there are so many who need to hear that you shouldn't be wasting your time with those who won't listen. Speak to them. Bring them the word. If they don't want to hear it, move on to someone else who also needs to hear that word.

But I find it to be amazing. Well, I find two things to be amazing. First, the text tells us that Jesus says a prophet is not without honor except in his own home. Then it tells us because of their unbelief, he couldn't do any miracles among them, except, you know, heal a few people. I love that "except." I love that it demonstrates that even their unbelief wasn't strong enough to completely stop Jesus from doing what he was called to do. So he was even able to

demonstrate his power and his authority in the midst of their unwillingness to trust and believe in him.

The text says that Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. I think really he was disappointed. These are people Jesus cared about. These are people that Jesus lived with and grew up around. Yet they're unwilling to be blessed by the gift that God is bringing through him. They're unwilling to allow God to bless them through Jesus' presence.

So what is Jesus do? Does he just wander off? No. He's energized all the more and the text tells us that he then went from village to village. He carries on with the mission that is his. To bring this good news of repentance and redemption and grace to as many people as possible. He goes from village to village.

Then he does an amazing thing. He takes his disciples aside and he pairs them up. Now let's remember who they are. They are the tax collector and the fisherman. They may have even been lower on the totem pole than a carpenter. They have little to no status in the community. Yet Jesus calls them and sends them and he gives them his power and authority. And the message they bring is a message to repent and turn to God.

There's an element in this sharing that I think is important and we should see and acknowledge. Jesus tells them that when they go into a town, if they are accepted, it says they are to stay in the same house while they're there. That's a powerful word - stay in the same house until you leave that town. Do you know what happens in that house? They have fellowship together. They have an opportunity to ask questions. They eat and they drink and they rest. They laugh and they tell stories. They develop friendships. So in each town they go to,

there's one particular family that gets extra blessed because they get to hang out a little bit longer with Jesus' disciples and get to know them.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, when we have the privilege of sharing our faith with others, we very likely also have the incredible privilege of making new friends and of sharing our life together. They will begin to see in us the good and the not-so-good. For authentically sharing our lives with others means, as some have said, warts and all.

In fact, we kind of see that also in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul starts off talking about boasting and saying, hey look, I could boast. I've experienced these amazing things of God. These revelations that no one else has had the privilege to see. I could boast, but I won't. I won't boast except in my weakness because the truth is the greatest things about me, the greatest things about Paul, pale in comparison to the greatness about Jesus.

While we can indeed make Christ known by sharing our lives, it's not only by the good parts of our life. It's by the reality, the truth of our lives and in that truth, others will see that we have experienced the forgiveness and love of God, not because we're great, but in spite of the fact that we're not. If we had the ability to be perfect and to demonstrate the perfection in us to others, no one would want to be around us. No one could relate to us because everybody knows and is aware of their own brokenness and flaws. Everyone knows they're not perfect. So if they think you are, they're not going to be able to relate to you.

What they're able to see in God's love and grace at work in us, regardless of our flaws is that it's available to them as well. God chooses to expand the sharing of the Good News of Christ, by not limiting it to just Jesus, but by empowering his disciples to also then be God's representatives to the world. He does the very same thing for you and for me. He gives us the

incredible privilege of being able to engage in the world, whether they want to hear it or not, whether their rebellious or not, to hear from God that he loves them, that they matter to him, that they're important to him, and that he is willing and wanting to forgive them and welcome them back. Repent and turn to God. Come face-to-face with a God who loves us and forgives us and frees us, to be a part of his work in the world.

Easy? No. Done by our own strength? No. Always accepted and received well? No. But it is our calling. It is our opportunity. So we, like Paul, get to boast in our weakness. We just need to be willing to be authentically ourselves and allow the work that God is doing in us to be seen. Sometimes that's embarrassing, but most of the time, it's exactly what people are able to relate to, to allow them to hear that we've received grace in our repentance and turning to God. And that's exactly what he's offered to the world.

We live in a time of serious criticism, polarization. People calling each other names and putting each other down. We live in a world where people believe that religion is the cause of a lot of the world's problems. And maybe it is. But we may very well hear from God who, by the power of his spirit, will stand us up on our feet. We may very well recognize an opportunity, even this very day, to share the truth of who God is and what God has done, and how God loves the people that he created. Maybe they'll listen and maybe they won't, but they'll know they heard God's voice among them. We can know that we've had the immense privilege of speaking for an almighty, gracious, loving, and faithful God. What a privilege! What a joy! Thanks be to God. Amen.