

Sermon for July 7, 2024 – 7th Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 2:1-5 EHV

Theme: Stand and Speak

- 1) The LORD empowers you with His Spirit.
- 2) The LORD equips you with His Word.

He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you.” ²The Spirit entered into me as he spoke to me and brought me up to my feet. Then I heard him speaking to me.

³He said to me, “Son of man, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to disloyal nations, who have been disloyal to me. They and their fathers have rebelled against me to this very day. ⁴These children of mine are brazen-faced and hard-hearted. I am sending you to them, and you are to tell them that this is what the LORD God says. ⁵Then, whether they listen or do not listen—for they are a rebellious house—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.

How many of you feel comfortable speaking to a friend or family member about God? Because of the wonderful grace the LORD shows us in Jesus, we should all be raising our hands, right? But did you notice that I didn't raise my hand?

Now, don't get me wrong: I love Jesus because Jesus loves me. The message of the Gospel is awesome, and I want everyone to know it. But, when witnessing Christ to family and friends, fearful thoughts enter my mind: What if I say the wrong thing and offend a person before I get to tell them about Jesus? How do I address their sin without them accusing me of being judgemental? How do I avoid conflict and rejection? I truly want everyone to know Jesus, but how do I get to the point that they will listen, because it seems like every time I try to bring the subject up, friends shut down?

Don't you also feel this way? If so, you are in good company. Even Moses felt unworthy of the task when God called him to be his witness. But know that such thoughts are not from God, they are from the devil who is doing all he can to prevent us from sharing the one thing that can truly save our loved ones from destruction: the Gospel of Jesus.

Yes, the truth God has given us in his Word is of the utmost importance. He knows that we can show no greater love to our family, friends, and acquaintances than sharing His Law and Gospel with them. That is why he called Ezekiel to be his witness among the exiles in Babylon. That is why he calls you to be his witness among your family, friends, and neighbours today.

Let us, therefore, find encouragement in God's calling of Ezekiel to continue witnessing the truth to those God puts in our life, under the theme: **Stand and Speak**. 1) The LORD empowers you with His Spirit. 2) The LORD equips you with His Word.

Part One: The LORD empowers you with His Spirit.

Our sermon text records God calling Ezekiel to be His witness to His wayward people in exile. Here's the situation:

God had long warned Judah that, unless they repent of their idolatries, the Babylonians would conquer Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and take the people captive. How did the Jews respond? By ignoring God's call to repentance and persecuting the prophets that proclaimed it. They convinced themselves that everything was going to be ok. Even when Babylon came to their doorsteps and took many of them captive (one of whom was Ezekiel), they still felt everything was fine – that there was no need to listen to anyone telling them otherwise.

I can't imagine how frustrating that must have been for Ezekiel, whose name means: "The LORD strengthens." The very people with whom he was taken into captivity were blindly going on as if their exile was a minor setback - that nothing bad would happen to Jerusalem. Instead of repenting, they continued in their sins – imagining that God was "ok" with it all, even though his prophets called them to repent.

So, what did Ezekiel do about all of that? He prayed that the LORD would be merciful to his countrymen. Why? Because Ezekiel loved them, despite their hostility towards him. Therefore, he prayed for their repentance and deliverance. He prayed that the LORD would send His promised Saviour.

Like Ezekiel, we find ourselves in exile in this evil world. Heaven is our home, and we are in distress. Why? Because our nation, once priding itself on having a Christian heritage, has turned away from Christ. And even though the LORD calls out to the people of our land – inviting them to turn to him for mercy in Jesus, most don't want to have anything to do with him. Sports, leisure, work, making a life for oneself – all these things seem to take priority over Christ. Most people in our country continue as if everything is fine. And if problems arise, they blame God for causing them.

So, what do we do in response? We pray. We ask the LORD to be merciful to our family, friends, and neighbours. We pray for their repentance and faith — that the Holy Spirit would move mightily in their hearts to see the truth and be saved.

And our prayers are not in vain. Not only does the LORD hear them, but he acts – calling us to share in His work of answering our prayers.

How did He do that for Ezekiel? He appeared to him in a magnificent vision, displaying his fearful glory. The sight was so awesome and terrifying that Ezekiel fell on his face.

Ezekiel reports what happened next: *He [the LORD] said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you.”*

I want to pause here and talk about what the LORD did. In and of himself, Ezekiel wasn't anyone special. He had no innate power, talent, or ability to be God's prophet, and yet the LORD chose him. He was a “son of man” - a sinful descendant of Adam. As such, he cowered in fear before the LORD's holiness – unable to stand before Him, just as none of us can stand before Him.

But, Ezekiel records: ²*The Spirit entered into me as he spoke to me and brought me up to my feet. Then I heard him speaking to me.*

The Holy Spirit himself raised Ezekiel; and how wonderful that is to note. Why? Because we are just as fearful and powerless as Ezekiel before our almighty God. And yet, what happens when the LORD speaks to us through His Word? He sends his Spirit to lift us on our feet and listen. Yes, God still reveals his glory to us – not in a vision of angels and a flaming throne, but in the Bible. And it is there that the LORD reveals to us his greatest, most outstanding glory in Christ. He, who is true God, took on human flesh and blood to suffer and die for the sins of the world. More than that, he rose from the dead, proving that all has been forgiven. He sends His Holy Spirit to awaken faith in our hearts to receive his grace through the preaching of the Gospel so that we might ever know him and be with him forever in paradise. Oh, how wonderful it is to see Jesus in Scripture because to see him is to see God and to listen to him is to listen to God. How can we not fall prostrate before our Saviour?

And the Holy Spirit lifts us as we listen to Jesus speak through His Word – awakening faith in our hearts to receive him. Not only that, but He also commissions us, as he commissioned Ezekiel, to confess his life-giving Word to the people he puts in our lives.

But, just as Ezekiel must have been scared as the Holy Spirit lifted him and commanded him to speak to the people, so we too are often scared. The LORD knows this about us, which is why he strengthens us through His Word and equips us with it – just as he did for Ezekiel. Yes, the more we simply listen to God speak, the more emboldened we become to share the Word that God has given us.

Part Two: The LORD equips you with His Word.

Ezekiel continues: ³*He said to me, “Son of man, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to disloyal nations, who have been disloyal to me. They and their fathers have rebelled against me to this very*

day. ⁴*These children of mine are brazen-faced and hard-hearted.*” Wow, the LORD doesn’t sugarcoat the difficulty Ezekiel would face. The people to whom Ezekiel was sent had hardened their hearts against the LORD – rebelling against his Word and showing no signs that they would listen to him.

The LORD doesn’t sugarcoat the difficulty we will face, either. The apostle Paul tells us that the Gospel sounds foolish to the worldⁱ and that, by nature, everyone is hostile to it.ⁱⁱ He writes: *“There is no one who is righteous, not even one. ¹¹There is no one who understands. There is no one who searches for God. ¹²They all turned away; together they became useless. There is no one who does what is good; there is not even one.”* ⁱⁱⁱ

But here is another truth to consider: we, too, were born with the same rebellious, corrupt nature against God that the rest of the world has. The only reason we believe is that the Holy Spirit has broken through our stubborn, hardened hearts with the power of his Word – the same powerful Word God wants us to share with those he puts in our lives.

Yes, even though the people to whom we witness are hard-hearted, God’s Word can break through that hardness, as the LORD says: ²⁹*Is not my word like a fire? declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?*^{iv}

And that is why we witness, because God’s Word alone has the power to save, regardless of how hardened a person is against it. The Holy Spirit uses His Word to bring a person to repentance and create a living faith in their dry, dead human heart. Because we know this to be true from both Scripture and our own experience, we are emboldened to share God’s Gospel with others.

But what exactly are we to say to those God puts into our life? Consider what God told Ezekiel: *I am sending you to them, and you are to tell them that this is what the LORD God says.* It is really that simple: just lovingly repeat what the LORD has told you in his Word. Call sin, “sin” and show them how all people (including us) need a Saviour. Then, point them to the Saviour – telling them from God’s Word who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Tell them this with a heart of genuine love — caring for their souls as Christ cares for you.

But what about the results? How do we get people to take to heart the message we share? Listen to what the LORD told Ezekiel: ⁵*Then, whether they listen or do not listen—for they are a rebellious house—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.* Whether or not people listen to us and believe is not our job. Our joyful duty is simply and lovingly to proclaim what God tells us in his Word. And if we do that, then we have done our part. Regardless of whether or not people listen, all will have to confess that a prophet has been among them. Who is that prophet? You are as you share God’s Word with others – for that is what a prophet does.

Just think, God honours you with the title of “prophet” as you simply share with others what God has shared with you in his Word. More than that, you will be shown to be a true prophet, for

everything God promises in His Word comes true – regardless of whether people believe it. At the end of time, everyone will have to confess that the Word of God you shared was exactly that: the Word of God.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, when God called you to faith he also made you his spokesman and representative to the people he has placed in your life. However, being Jesus' witness is scary – especially if we think it's up to us to convince people to repent and believe. But it's not up to us, that's up to God. Our job is simply to speak God's truth in love to those God puts in our lives. And God empowers and equips us for this task. How? By filling us with the Holy Spirit as he speaks to us through his Word that we, ourselves, might believe and repent. Then, with that same Word, God tells us to go and share with others what he has shared with us. Look for the opportunities God gives you to tell others about Jesus and the salvation we have through faith in Him, as the apostle Peter once wrote: *Regard the Lord, the Christ, as holy in your hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you. But speak with gentleness and respect.*^v

Then prayerfully leave the results in God's hands. Regardless of whether or not people listen to you, have confidence in God's Word - trusting that the same Spirit that worked repentance in faith in your heart has gone out with the message you spoke. Trust in God's promise: *My word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it.*^{vi}

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, don't be afraid to Stand and Speak: 1) The LORD empowers you with His Spirit. 2) The LORD equips you with His Word. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23,27

ⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 8:7

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 3:10-12 EHV

^{iv} Jeremiah 23:29 EHV

^v 1 Peter 3:15-16 EHV

^{vi} Isaiah 55:11 EHV