

7th Sunday after Pentecost
July 7, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Ezekiel 2:1-7

Dear Friends in Christ,

248 years ago, our nation declared its independence. We have survived wars including the first one to win our independence, a terrible Civil War, the Great War and a war to end all wars, which of course didn't. We've survived great fires, earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis. We've survived a Great Depression, stock market collapses and terrorist attacks. For 248 years, our nation has persevered. But if you listen to the political commentators, we won't survive past November if the wrong candidate is elected president. The message from both sides is basically that if you don't vote for the correct candidate, our nation won't see its 249th birthday. Save the nation by voting for our candidate.

Now, we are citizens of God's kingdom and at the same time, citizens of the United States of America. Adult citizens of this nation have the right and responsibility to vote. It is God pleasing to vote in national, state and local elections. Learn what you can and vote for the candidates who make it possible for us to "live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and dignity." (1 Timothy 2:2). But let's get our priorities straight today. Saving our nation should not be our number one priority. The rise and fall of nations is in God's hands. Our God-given job in the Word of God before us this morning is to proclaim God's truth to those who listen and to those who will reject God's truth.

This is the mission God gives to the prophet Ezekiel. Certainly, Ezekiel did not have a vote in the elections of his nation. The Jewish people were in exile. The Babylonians exiled many from Jerusalem. Soon the city would be destroyed along with the temple. Ezekiel was living with a group of fellow exiles in Babylon. God does not give him the job of saving the nation of Israel, but of saving the souls he is with by proclaiming the truth of God's Word. Listen again to Ezekiel 2:1-7

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. ⁶But you, son of man, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words. Even though briars and thorns surround you and you are living with scorpions, do not be afraid of their words, and do not be intimidated by the look on their faces, for they are a rebellious house. ⁷You are to speak my words to them whether they listen or they do not, for they are rebellious.

So, here we are in the United States, about 2,600 years after God spoke to Ezekiel. Have things improved since then? We are a free people in a free nation. We thank our God for those blessings. However, could we, the people, still be described like the Lord God described the people Ezekiel lived among? Disloyal, rebellious, brazen-faced, hard-hearted, like briars and thorns and scorpions. We look at the data and see people's loyalty to the Triune God waning as the number of those who label themselves as having no religious affiliation grows each year. We see active rebellion against the clear commands of God. We see hatred for others and a refusal by many to admit that they are wrong. And if you have ever read the comment section of an online article or gotten into a social media debate, the comments are often as sharp and stinging as a

scorpion. People haven't changed. People still need to hear the clear call to repentance from the Word of God. And we live among such people today. God has called us to do this for the people we live among – our family, friends, coworkers, classmates and more.

There might be a part of us that relishes this opportunity to point out the sins of others. We kind of like being the morality police. So, we point the finger at those who sin and say “that’s where the bad people live.” We know the law of God so well and make sure other Christians know that we are better than them. We become arrogant in our own righteousness and the people we live among soon identify us as a holier-than-thou type. God took drastic measures to keep his prophets from developing this attitude. When Moses got angry with God’s people, God did not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land. And God humbled Ezekiel before calling him to the mission of proclaiming God’s truth to a rebellious people.

You should read chapter one this week. In summary, Ezekiel is given a vision of heaven. He sees the angels, cherubim. These heavenly creatures each have four faces along with wings. In addition, there are wheels within wheels, and the rims of the wheels are covered with eyes. It is impossible to accurately picture such a vision. But that is not the most awe-inspiring sight. Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord – a human likeness with gleaming metal, bright light, a rainbow, and fire. Ezekiel tells us what he did at that moment. “I fell on my face” (Ezekiel 1:28).

Ezekiel saw the power, majesty and holiness of the Lord God. He was humbled and showed it by falling on his face before God. This must be our attitude as well. For when faced with the power and holiness of the Lord God, our rebellious heart is exposed. The pride we have in our obedience to the law is shown to be garbage. Before the holy God we cannot pretend to be better than anyone else. He knows the truth. All we can do is fall before him in humble repentance. Then, and only then, are we ready to bring God’s law and gospel to others.

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.

The only way Ezekiel is able to stand before God and listen to his Lord God is because the Holy Spirit empowered him to stand. In a similar way, we are only able to stand before God and listen to him because the Holy Spirit comes to us with the message of the forgiveness of sins. Since Christ has paid for our sins and the Holy Spirit has applied this forgiveness to us through the Word and Sacraments, we are able to stand before God. We are empowered to humbly listen and carry out our mission to bring souls in our lives the saving Word of God.

Notice also what the Lord calls Ezekiel – son of man. It is a reminder that Ezekiel is descended from the first man, Adam. It is a reminder that he was born in the sinful image of Adam instead of in the perfect image of God. So too with us. Therefore, we humble ourselves and depend fully on our Triune God to lift us up and empower us to do his will. So, what shall we proclaim?

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.”

We are to proclaim what the Lord God says, no more and no less. We might say less than what the Lord God says when we are afraid of a person’s reaction. God warned Ezekiel that some of the people would not listen to the Word of God. These people will be like briars, thorns and scorpions. Ezekiel will feel their sting. But he is to speak the truth anyway for it is God’s truth and the only way to call a sinner to repentance so that person may be forgiven. So, we too should be willing to feel the sting of rejection by speaking the truth that can lead to a person’s salvation.

As we tell someone the truth, that they are sinning against the Lord God, we must also do so with

humility and with the purpose of bring that person Christ's forgiveness. Just as it is easy to stay silent when we think someone won't listen to us, so it is easy to go too far the other direction. We can become angry that someone did not listen to me. We can point out God's truth to make myself seem better, to separate myself from the other person. Instead of concern for the person who is sinning, we are concerned about how being associated with them makes me look. Paul's advice to Timothy is good for all of us:

Preach the word. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage, with all patience and teaching. (1 Timothy 4:2)

Instead of saying too little, sometimes we say more than what God says when trying to explain why terrible things happen in this world, especially when trying to comfort someone who has suffered through some evil in this world. We might be like Job's friends and look for sins in that person's life as an explanation of why God allowed tragedy to strike them, but God hasn't told us that in the Bible. We might try to explain away evil by telling someone the specific good things God is going to do for them since they suffered in this way, but God has not told us specifics like this. So, what can we say to someone who is suffering? We can say what the Lord God says:

By the mercies of the Lord we are not consumed, for his compassions do not fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23).

For the Lord will not desert his people, and he will never forsake those who are his own. (Psalm 94:14)

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even if he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never perish." (John 11:25-26)

The Lord God called on Ezekiel to speak God's words to the people and we have been called to speak God's words to those in our lives. We must not say more than God says, but we must also not be silent when comforting words are right there in the Bible. We are to say what the Lord God says.

As we look back on our witness, we will see times we should have spoken but didn't and times we should have stayed silent but didn't. We have not been, nor will we be the best at applying God's truth to ourself and to the others in our lives. Why not give up and let the professionals, like pastors and theologians, do this work? The Lord God has called all of us to meaningful ministry with the people we live among. In addition, the Son of God took the title of Son of Man. For Ezekiel, son of man, was a reminder that he was a descendant of sinful Adam. For Jesus, Son of Man, is a reminder that he is one of us, a true human being, yet without sin. God made his dwelling among us. The Son of Man and Son of God always said the right thing to people at the right time. Christ did not hide the truth of God's Word. He said hard things even when he knew people would not listen. He brought the comfort of the gospel to all who were burdened. By his perfect words, he has covered our imperfect words. By his innocent death, he has removed the guilt of our sins.

So don't give up on proclaiming what the Lord God says. He gives you peace, forgiveness and eternal life. We want others to have these same gifts from Christ and have been called to this meaningful ministry to the individuals in our lives. We pray that the Holy Spirit empowers us to stand and proclaim what the Lord God says to those who will listen and to those who will not.

Amen.