

Rev. Dan Welch Pentecost 15 9-10-23 Text- Ezekiel 33: 7-9

Our text for today is from the book of the prophet Ezekiel. So, what do you recall about Ezekiel? Yes, he was called by God to be his *prophet*, but what else do you know? Well, here are some facts about Ezekiel:

Did you know that Ezekiel had already been taken into exile to the land of Babylon before he received his call from God? Did you know that God told him he would be speaking His words to a people notorious for being hardheaded and strong-willed? Did you know that the Lord tells Ezekiel to speak His truth to people who will rebel and not listen no matter what he says? Did you know that God calls upon Ezekiel to speak His words and then makes him mute so that he can only speak when God tells him to? Did you know that God has Ezekiel do all kinds of strange things—like lie on his side for 390 days and then roll over and lie on his other side for forty days? Like shave his beard and head, and cook his food over cow dung? Talk about a hard life!

My first thought is, “Who wants to be Ezekiel?” Any volunteers? Being a prophet of the Most High God does not always come with a great and wonderful job description. It can be embarrassing, disgusting, and most of all dangerous. All the strange assignments, all the frustrating and fruitless preaching, all the dangerous rebellion all around. Who wants to be Ezekiel? I am pretty sure that even *Ezekiel* does not want to be Ezekiel!

My second thought is, “*I* am Ezekiel!” God has called me to preach his Word no matter what. God tells me to be faithful regardless of the consequences, regardless of the situation, regardless of the number of people in the pews. God lays out His task, His mission, before me, and not only does it seem daunting, but truth be told, some days it even feels pointless! Who cares what I have to say? Who will listen? But as a called and ordained pastor, I am called by God to be about the work of the Kingdom, which He lays out before me. I am Ezekiel!

My third thought may be even more frightening. My third thought is, “*You* are Ezekiel!” “Wait a minute,” you say. “I didn’t volunteer for this. I didn’t sign up for that. I was just minding my own business.” Yes, just like Ezekiel. “I’m not trained! I am not qualified! I’m just a layperson!” Yes, just like Ezekiel. The Lord God sends you and me from here in the pew to out in the world. He sends us as sheep among wolves. He sends us out with His Holy Word, which causes people to gnash their teeth in anger and rage. You are Ezekiel, I am Ezekiel . . . and it’s a frightening reality!

Yes, it’s terrifying to be Ezekiel!—not just because he had such a tough job description, but because all the sent-out people of God have tough duties ahead of them. In truth, this is no different for us, and God does not claim anything different

for us. It's very frightening, terrifying, because we know who we are!

We are unqualified; we are sinners. Everything about us begs the question, "Why me, Lord?" I'm a lost and condemned sinner. I have sinned against the Lord in thought, word, and deed, by what I have done and left undone. My sin stands in the way of my relationship with God. I walk paths that are dark and unhealthy. I live in ways that are corrupt and filthy. I follow paths that are choked with the thorns and thistles of the evil one. How can God use *me*? How can He send *me*? How can He expect righteousness from *me*, the most unrighteous, the chief of sinners? Who will *not* see me for what I am?

And look where the Lord wants us to go. Have you read the papers, listened to the radio, checked the internet? The landscape in this world of ours in *no way* resembles a manicured English garden! It is a mess, a big mess! Not a mess that can be handled with a garden rake. No, we're looking at a bulldozer here! It is a terrible, frightening mess, and, truthfully, my presence can only make it worse.

In truth, we *are* as bad as those to whom we're sent. We are no *different* from them really—sinners who have stopped their ears against the Word of God, hearing only what we want to hear, listening to the things that scratch our itching ears. If God thinks that I can be Ezekiel, then He's overestimated me, because I am a failure! I am unworthy, unqualified to serve the Lord.

And it's all true . . . but did I mention that Ezekiel felt the *same* and *said* the same?

Ezekiel, me, you—*none* of us is qualified. Yet the Lord calls, qualifies, and sends us anyway. The Lord God knows the breadth and depth of our sin, and He knows our inability to walk away and be cleansed from this sin. He knows, and so He sends the light of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to pierce the darkness of this world and the darkness of our flesh. He *becomes* flesh to dwell among us so that He can take on the forces of sin, death, and Satan in our place. Jesus journeys to the cross at Calvary carrying the burden of the sin of the world, and He lays down His life in our place. He washes and cleanses us from sin and every evil. He redeems our life and restores our souls. And He calls out. Out of the darkness of sin and death, He calls us into His marvelous light. Now we belong to Him. We are the people of God. Once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God . . . because we've been called into this reality.

Ezekiel, me, you—now we are *all* qualified . . . not by our own merits or works. Not by the works of my hand or the words of my lips. We are qualified because God Himself has qualified us by the holy blood of His Only Begotten. The blood that flows from the Savior as He hangs on the tree not only washes away our sin, but it also brings us into the Kingdom. It qualifies us to be the children of God; it qualifies us to

be servants of the Holy Gospel of Jesus. God has qualified us through His Son, and He continues to renew, restore, and redeem us with His gifts of Word and Sacrament. He prepares us to be His preachers, His teachers, His lights, His witnesses in this world.

So, He sends us out—Ezekiel, me, you. He sends us out. He calls us, qualifies us, and sends us out. Never alone, not without preparation, not without His truth to proclaim, never without words that give life—He sends us out.

Yes, the world is just as dark today as it was when Ezekiel was sent. It is a hostile environment and an antagonistic climate that we live in. But it is into **this** world, **this** reality, that we are sent. No one will try to convince you that this is **easy** work, a **simple** task, or even a **great** vocation. But it is **that** to which we are called as the children of God who walk and live in the grace poured out on the cross.

Saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been called to be watchmen over God's people. Ezekiel's call was to proclaim God's Word and so reclaim sinners for true life as God's people. This is our call today. "Go and make disciples of all nations", is how Jesus says it in Matthew 28:19. And it's also what Jesus is speaking about in our Gospel lesson from Matthew 18: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me . . . If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray" (vv. 5, 12-13).

Today, like Ezekiel back then, we are called to be personal soul winners, we are called to joy, the joy of sharing the message of Jesus's death and resurrection with others. Ezekiel's name means, "God strengthens," or "strengthened by God" and so are we, by the power of God's Holy Spirit working through His Word and Sacraments.

Baptized into Christ, called by His name, we pray for the grace to know and continue to share the promises of His kingdom in our church, in our school, in our families, and in our communities. Regardless of what may happen, we have one task, as Paul declares it in 2 Timothy 4:2: "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching". May God grant us the grace to do just that, Amen.