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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
July 8, 2018  
7<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Mark 6:1-6  
Hymns: 16; 485; 482; 283 (242:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 2:1-5

“<sup>1</sup> And He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.” <sup>2</sup> Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. <sup>3</sup> And He said to me: “Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. <sup>4</sup> For *they are* impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ <sup>5</sup> As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they *are* a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: The Public Ministry

The public ministry is a facet of the ministry of the gospel, or as the Apostle Paul references it, the ministry of reconciliation. Ministry means service. The ministry of the gospel is a ministry to which the Lord called His Church, the assembly of all believers.

We sometimes call this the invisible Christian church because it is made up of all who believe no matter where they may be in this world. Since we can't see into people's hearts we cannot be sure who is included. We can only go by profession of faith. The problem is there are people who slip into the wrong profession of faith, and yet are true believers in Christ, and there are others who gather with those who faithfully profess the truth of God's Word, and yet they don't actually believe what they profess to believe.

The ministry belongs to Christ's Church here on earth, and the public ministry is exercised among groups of Christians who gather to advance that ministry of the Word, whether that be a congregation or synod, or some other type of manmade organization.

The ministry of the gospel gives each of us Christ-believers a very special purpose while we live here on earth. We are to be faithful witnesses of God's truth to this world in all we say and do. We are to advance the gospel of God's love for the salvation of souls. We are to look out for one another, not only in things material, but far more importantly in things spiritual. This is not only a weighty responsibility but it is also a great and high privilege to serve the Lord and His Church.

To better pursue this purpose the Lord established the public ministry by calling pastors and teachers and elders and others to fulfill varying aspects of the ministry on the behalf and in the name of the congregation or church organization.

How is it possible for us to serve so high a calling? Through our text this morning the Spirit would grant us wisdom and power from on high:

**THEME: Learning from the Prophet's Call.**

And indeed that is the first lesson that we learn from the Prophet Ezekiel's call to ministry; he was -

**I. Empowered by the Holy Spirit.**

The entire first chapter of Ezekiel relates a vision that Ezekiel saw as a portion or preface to his call as prophet. It was a vision of God

in His glory and divine majesty. The concluding verse of that chapter says: “*This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.*” (Ezekiel 1:28b) Falling on his face was not only an act of reverence, but one of awe and fear at the vision of the glory of the LORD. This was such an intense experience that when it was over Ezekiel went to the river bank of the River Chebar where the Jews in exile gathered for prayer, and sat there astonished for seven days. Who can stand such a thing as seeing the glory of the LORD and being called as the prophet of God, to serve the Lord among His people? It is too great a thing for one to take upon himself.

That is part of this lesson. Too many would presume to be the Lord’s spokesperson without being called. On the other hand, too many think it a small thing, an insignificant assignment to carry out in this life when compared with all the grand things that people do in science, in business, in politics, or even in charitable foundations. Learn from Ezekiel. This is too great a thing for us to comprehend and absorb, for the Lord, He is God, and He has called me through you to serve as your pastor, to shepherd His flock here in Austin. He has called me through you, because He has entrusted His glorious gospel of forgiveness and life to **you**. So you called me, and also Sunday school teachers, and council members, and others to assist the congregation in the administration of this high calling of God.

All too often we are not even the least bit astonished, but we ought to be, for who is worthy of such a high calling? So we learn from the prophet Ezekiel’s calling. Our text teaches us how it was possible for Ezekiel, and so for us.

**Ezekiel 2:1-2** “<sup>1</sup> And He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.” <sup>2</sup> Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me.

Did you catch that? It wasn’t Ezekiel’s strength, even for standing on his feet. It was the Spirit that lifted Ezekiel so that he could hear the calling of God. It was the Spirit that entered Ezekiel so that Ezekiel truly heard, not simply with his ears but with his heart and

soul the words of God's calling. Do you grasp the significance of that statement? Ezekiel was called by God to proceed with the authority of the Lord. Ezekiel was to be the Lord's spokesperson to the Jews in captivity in Babylon. Who Ezekiel was as a person apart from this call of the Lord didn't matter. What mattered was whose authority stood behind the message Ezekiel would present in both words and his manner of life.

In the great commission the Lord Jesus authorized us, and sent us to make disciples of all the nations. We are to represent the Lord in this world and endeavor to make disciples of others, which of course we cannot do. What we are assigned to do is to be faithful witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ in both what we say, and in our manner of life. We recognize that it is not dependent upon our person, how gifted we are, how popular we may be, or engaging in conversation. It is the Holy Spirit that lifts us up, that opens our ears that we might hear the calling of the Lord, and it is the Spirit that empowers us to act as the authorized representatives of God to His people and to society, and to the world!

Now, what do we say and to whom should we say it? Again we learn more about our own calls from Ezekiel's call. We are --

## **II. Sent By God to Proclaim His Word.**

**Ezekiel 2:3-4** "And He said to me: 'Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. <sup>4</sup>For *they are* impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ' "Thus says the Lord God." ' "

First consider Ezekiel's audience as described by the Lord. I find it daunting at best to think, that going in, Ezekiel knows his audience will be difficult. The Lord is sending Ezekiel to people who were rebellious, and even in exile they remained rebellious, placing their hopes for deliverance on something other than turning to the Lord in true repentance, actually refusing to repent.

As your called pastor I am able to assume that you want to hear the truth, and that includes the truth about your sin, and not only about

God's love. Well, it is always dangerous to assume, in fact when one assumes one is often wrong, maybe tragically wrong. We too, (and this includes me) could be and are described by the Lord as a rebellious people. Our sinful flesh rears its ugly head all too often at the truth of God, and doesn't want to be told how to live. Indeed we think we know from our gut or from our own wisdom how to live better than God can tell us. We know what feels right and what we want. We know from life experience that security in life comes from working hard and saving your hard earned money, and that if you do right by yourself, you too will be able to have the good life, to eat, drink, and be merry right into retirement.

So how is one to proceed when one is called to address the needs of a rebellious people? It is tempting to avoid the issues, and talk about other things. It is tempting not to talk at all, let things slide.

What do we learn from Ezekiel's call? Ezekiel was not to speak the words he thought people wanted to hear. He was instructed to say to this stubborn people, "**Thus says the Lord!**" That was what people needed to hear, and that was what Ezekiel was called to do.

That is what I am called to do as your pastor. In fact you asked me to swear that this is what I would do as your pastor. I swore without reservation to speak to you the Word of God. As I conclude reading the sermon text on Sunday mornings I always remind you: "This is the Word of God." In the sermon, as I am doing right now, I expound upon that Word of God, but I am still under oath to teach you only the truth of God's Word. I am bound by that. You are to be confident that when I am talking to you of life and salvation I am speaking God's truth, nothing more and nothing less, whether that be from the pulpit or sitting in your living room. You must hold me to that.

This is to characterize the ministry of the congregation in its every phase or application. We are not free to change things up. We are bound by the Word of God. We are bound by the Word of God because it is only the truth of God that saves people from sin, sin in their lives now, sin's consequences in temporal and eternal death. So we know that the Lord is holding us to this for it is the Lord who has called us to serve as ministers, as servants of His Word, as servants of His people.

But you know some might point out that this isn't working out so great for us. Our numbers aren't growing like we would like. Well what do we learn from Ezekiel's call? We should be --

### III. Prepared for a Varied Response.

**Ezekiel 2:5** "As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they *are* a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them."

God's message to Ezekiel was that it shouldn't impact his ministry if they refuse to hear or if they do hear. I'm not saying that the Lord was telling Ezekiel that he shouldn't care. A called servant is called to care, and to care very deeply about those to whom he is called to serve. Ezekiel did care about his fellow countrymen with whom he was in exile, however Ezekiel wouldn't be doing anyone any favors by changing things up to get a positive response, to gain acceptance from his audience. It wouldn't do them any good to hear something other than what the Lord says.

Ezekiel experienced wide variations in how his message was received. Before the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed the people held on to the false promises of prophets who were **not** called by God. The people in exile held on to false hopes that got in the way of true repentance, and which continued to estrange them from God. After Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar the people in exile lost hope, starting with the false hope that they had maintained in spite of the words of Ezekiel. Then Ezekiel was given a message to restore hope, but hope based on the sure mercies of God as Lord and Savior.

So we also need to stay focused on message, and not on response. The Lord will do as He pleases, and His desires for the salvation of all is clear. We need to be faithful. People need to despair of false hopes; the false hope that God wouldn't punish the evil that they do, or the false hope that their own kind deeds are sufficient righteousness to appease the wrath of God, or the false hope that in the final judgment God won't send anyone to eternal death in hell. These false hopes must be gone, and when they are people will despair of salvation based on their own merit or worthiness. Oh,

yes living in a society that thinks about entitlements as part of life, can also be a challenge. People are slow to think otherwise with salvation. People think they are entitled to eternal life in heaven simply because they are alive. They don't yet understand what the Spirit has taught us about entitlement, that we indeed deserve nothing but punishment, "*for the wages of sin is death.*" (Romans 6:23)

When sinners comprehend that death is all they are entitled to, then and only then will the words and promises of God in Christ mean anything to them. Then and only then will the Spirit' power open sinners' hearts to know and believe that peace which we possess with God by His grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

Stay focused on the message and let God deal with the responses of the people. Only He knows how to save sinners. He has simply entrusted us with His Word. Life really can't get more purposeful than that.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.