

Sermon Draft

Text: Ezekiel 33:7–9

Sermon: “What About Ezekiel?”

We are in the midst of the long season of Pentecost. Frequently this season is seen as a time of preparation for the eschatological coming of the King.

Preparation in the midst of a wicked and evil world is the focus as the Church prepares for her King. This preparation takes place both within and outside of the Church, as the lessons for this day indicate.

In the Psalm, for example, David, himself a king, declares that one is blessed by the divine King, Yahweh, when he acknowledges his sin and receives the Lord’s forgiveness (Psalm 32:1, 5). This understanding comes to David after he for nine months “kept silent” about his guilt with Bathsheba and his “bones wasted away” (32:3).

In the Epistle, Paul teaches us that while we await the return of Christ our King, we Christians are to subject ourselves to earthly kings, even if these “governing authorities” are as wicked as the Roman emperor and his appointees—for even these are appointed by God (Romans 13:1–2).

And in the Gospel, Jesus tells us that to be in the kingdom at all requires becoming like little children (Matthew 18:3). Therefore, the Church will constantly prepare for her King's return by warning of and rebuking sin (18:15–17), just as Ezekiel was called to do.

Our text for today is from the book of the prophet Ezekiel. What do you know about Ezekiel? Yes, he was called by God to be his prophet, but what else do you know?

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 manner of strange and weird 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? Did you know all that?

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 job description. It can be embarrassing, disgusting, and most certainly dangerous. All the strange assignments, all the frustrating and fruitless preaching, all the dangerous rebellion all around. Who wants to be Ezekiel? I am fairly certain 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 it even seems pointless! Who cares what I have to say except when I’m preaching to the choir? 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 is 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. I was just minding my own business.” Yes, just like Ezekiel. “I am 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 . . . and it is a frightening reality!

Terrifying, is it not? It is 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. 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 am 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 brambles 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 miscalculated, because I am a failure! I am unworthy, unqualified to serve the Lord.

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. Christ 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 no people, but now we are the people of God . . . because we have 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 adversarial 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.

One of my favorite sayings is: “God does not call the qualified; he qualifies the called.” True for Ezekiel, true for me, and true for you. God qualifies the called! God qualifies us to be His “Ezekiels” to our world.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.