

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

July 4, 2021

**COLLECT:** O God, you have taught us to keep your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

**THE LESSONS:** Old Testament: Ezekiel 2:1-5

Psalm: 123

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

Gospel: Mark 6:1-13

**THE SERMON:** Good morning, my hope is that you enjoy this day the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, a day that we celebrate as Independence Day. This day a federation of rag tag states was to become a nation that is now our home.

The Old Testament and the Gospel lessons today focus on a home coming.

The Old Testament lesson begins with God speaking to the prophet Ezekiel. The nation of Israel is in the Babylonian Exile and God is speaking to Ezekiel so that he can prepare the people for the ending of this exile and the return home to Judah and Jerusalem. First, he reminds Ezekiel of the reason Israel is in captivity. He said: "Mortal (man) I am sending you to the people of Israel, a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me this very day." Imagine, **God is saying to Ezekiel and to you and me today: people are still at it.**

God tells Ezekiel that the people of Israel have not been faithful, they have worshipped other gods, have not loved their neighbors as themselves, and

they have oppressed and exploited the poor. Yet God still loves them. He is sending Ezekiel with a message to a rude and stubborn people. This message should get their attention and cause them to change their behaviors and again turn to being obedient to God.

God tells Ezekiel the people may hear and accept the words he will speak, to them, or they may refuse to hear them.

God then consoles Ezekiel. Either way, Ezekiel will have done his job. The divine power of God allows Ezekiel to continue to be faithful and at work among these stubborn people.

In the Gospel Jesus goes to his hometown of Nazareth taking his disciples along with him. On the sabbath he goes to the synagogue where he reads the lessons and begins to speak on them. The people are amazed at what he is saying and wonder where he has gotten this wisdom. Some of what he is saying is new to them. They have also heard about some of the miracles he has done.

They wonder, who is this? They say we know his family; they are ordinary people just like us. In fact, they still live here in Nazareth. Jesus grew up here before he went away. Where did he go? The big question is: What makes him so different? Where did he get this power to heal the sick? Where did his power come from?

Because they were so familiar with the lives of Jesus family and Jesus himself, they couldn't believe he was really different, a man anointed by God with a special power.

The story of what had happened on the day of his baptism had, perhaps, not gotten to Nazareth. They didn't know that God himself, had spoken the

words: This is my Son in whom I am well pleased, listen to him. They didn't know that at the same time, the divine power of the Holy Spirit landed on and enveloped Jesus.

Had they known this, they would have known where Jesus got his power and wisdom. Just like it was with Ezekeil a few believed and accepted what Jesus said, but the majority didn't. He was able to heal and cure a few sick people. There was no eager crowd of followers there in Nazareth.

Jesus said to the people of Nazareth: Prophets are respected and honored, but not in their own towns and not by their own kin. Jesus recognized that people held on to their old experiences with him growing up among them. At that time, he too, appeared to be an ordinary person doing the things they all did.

But he went away and now he is back. They really don't know him, he is different.

So again, just like Ezekiel, Jesus stayed in the area and went to teach and preach in the villages around Nazareth.

To further spread the word, he sent his disciples out on a mission. He gave them the power to cast out unclean demons. Remember the disciples had received the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Jesus sent them out two by two. They were to take nothing with them but a staff for safety and protection. They would be dependent on the people; some would accept them and some would turn them away.

If people offered hospitality, a place to stay, they were to remain there until they had completed their mission in that area. If a town rejected them, as they left that town, they were to shake off its dust from their feet. The scripture

says this was to be a testimony against that town, do you think it was more like a curse?

If you look further into the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel you will find it was not easy for Ezekiel and Jesus to do God's work. The proof is there that God was at work in their lives. However, not all people accepted the words, the lessons, the examples or even the miracles that they witnessed.

Today it is no different, look at the population of this Judeo-Christian nation. How many people attend or are affiliated with houses of faith? It is easier to get the word out today thanks to technology, but people still reject the beliefs of faith.

I truly believe that the work of all faiths is to teach people to live together in harmony. But you tell me, as you look around this world, do you see the majority of neighbors loving others as they love themselves.

Instead, do you see people living lives that say: I've got mine and yours don't matter?

To you who listened to the words of Ezekiel and Jesus, keep on believing, keep on fighting for good and in words that came out of the Civil Rights Movement, **Keep Your Hands On The Plow.** Amen.

Rev. Lionel Starkes