

PROPHETS WITHOUT HONOUR
Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Pentecost, 2021
Ezekiel 2:1-5

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon is our First Reading from before, Ezekiel 2:1-5: ¹ **He told me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet, that I may speak to you!”**

² **The Spirit entered me when He spoke to me and set me on my feet, and I heard Him speaking to me.** ³ **He told me: “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to the rebellious nations that have rebelled against Me. They and their fathers have been in revolt against Me to this very day.** ⁴ **They are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall tell them: ‘This is what the Lord GOD has said.’** ⁵ **As for them, whether they listen or refuse to listen - for they are a rebellious family — they will, nevertheless, realise that a prophet has been among them.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

All three of our readings today are similar in that they speak of “*prophets without honour*.” Prophets without honour are what we see in our world today - that is what we see in our nation today. And who are these prophets who do not receive the honour befitting the message that they bring? It is those whom the Lord calls to preach the Word of God.

Ezekiel was called to be God’s prophet to the nation of Israel. The LORD told Ezekiel: **“Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to the rebellious nations that have rebelled against Me. They and their fathers have been in revolt against Me to this very day.** ⁴ **They are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall tell them: ‘This is what the Lord GOD has said.’** ⁵ **As for them, whether they listen or refuse to listen - for they are a rebellious family — they will, nevertheless, realise that a prophet has been among them.”**

So this was Ezekiel’s calling and job description. Ezekiel was to take His message to people descended from Israel. Because of God’s choice of their nation to produce the Saviour, these people had a special national relationship with God. Nevertheless, most of them had rebelled against Him, insisting on following other gods. They had further insisted on disobeying God’s will. This is why they were in exile. But even their years of exile had not led most of them to repent of their rebellious ways. In spite of their lack of an inclination to repent and in spite of what appeared to be a lost cause, God still sent His prophet to these people. Ezekiel would be a prophet without honour. Nevertheless, regardless of the reception he received, Ezekiel was called to be faithful in speaking the message given to him. He was to disregard the people’s willingness or unwillingness to receive his message. He was not to stop transmitting the Lord’s message even if they refused to listen to it because that is what a true prophet does. A prophet (or pastor) who preaches only what his audience wants to hear is rebellious and unfaithful. A prophet or pastor is not called to be successful by earthly standards but to be faithful.

Sometimes when we hear the word “prophet,” we think of someone who is able to predict the future. Now sometimes, the Old Testament prophets did that, foretelling what would come because the Lord had revealed that knowledge to them. But the big thing about the biblical prophets is not so much foretelling as it is “forth-telling.” The prophets were to forth-tell; that is, they were to speak forth the Word that the Lord had for them to speak. And it was a word of Law and Gospel. Often there was some serious *Law*, calling the nation to repentance for their sins, even pronouncing judgment on the nation when they would not repent. At the same time, there was also a message of the *Gospel*, a word of hope for the faithful remnant, assuring them that the Lord would not forget them, even as judgment would fall on the nation as a whole. Forth-telling, telling forth the Word of the Lord, speaking faithfully the message of Law and Gospel is what prophets are called to do. And when they are not received, as was often the case, then they are prophets without honour.

In our Gospel for today, we heard how Jesus went to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth and began to teach there. He spoke forth much great wisdom, namely, the proper understanding and application of God’s Law, how God’s people are to live, and the powerful proclamation of God’s promises, how they are fulfilled now in Him, how the kingdom of heaven has come among us in the person of Christ, and yet the people would not listen. Mark records how “*They took offence at Him.*” So Jesus said to them, “*A prophet is not without honour, except in his hometown, among his relatives and in his family*” (Mark 6:3-4). They had rejected Jesus and what He spoke. In their anger, they even attempted to cast Him off the

cliff at the edge of town.¹ Apathy and unbelief filled the whole town. It was not surprising that our Lord “*was amazed at their unbelief.*” Knowing the Scriptures, they were without excuse in refusing to acknowledge Him as God’s prophet and their Saviour.

Jesus Himself was a prophet without honour. In fact, He is *the* Prophet without honour. Therefore, all those whom He sends out in His name, bearing His message - they too will be prophets without honour. That is what Jesus tells His disciples when He sends them out. He tells them, quite frankly, that there will be those who will not receive them. He says, “*Moreover, if any place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake off the dust that is under your feet, as a testimony against them!*” *They went out and preached that people should repent* (Mark 6:11-12).

Jesus tells them that there will be those who will not receive them, but still, they go out. Jesus’ commission encouraged them to go and also gave them the courage to go and preach. So they did what they were sent to do: They proclaimed that people should repent.

What is it to repent, and why is it so important that preachers proclaim it? In Biblical Hebrew, the idea of repentance is represented by two verbs meaning *to return* and *to feel sorrow.*² In the New Testament, the word translated as repentance in Greek³ means to *have a change of mind and change of conduct.* To repent means to turn from your sins - to acknowledge them, confess them, and turn from them. To repent means to change your way of thinking, your whole mindset about things, to see things from God’s perspective, as His Word is proclaimed to you. It means to give up on self and to rely on God for the righteousness you need to stand before Him. All this is packed into the preaching of repentance.

But people do not like to hear this. Like the Lord God had said of the Israelites, “**they are a rebellious family.**” People chafe at the bit. They do not like to hear they are sinners in need of a Saviour. They do not like to be told to repent because there is a coming judgment. They do not like to be told that salvation is out of their hands; therefore they cannot save themselves. No one likes to hear this. No one like to hear that the things we love to do often go against God’s will - that these things are sin and that we are guilty and that we are called to turn from them. We don’t like to hear this. The people we preach to - they don’t like to hear this. And so, often, they take out their anger on the preacher. They turn a deaf ear to the church, and they shake their fist at God. That is why Ezekiel and all of Jesus’ messengers are treated as prophets without honour.

Some 650-odd years after Ezekiel, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians. Paul had been very busy over the years, travelling far and wide to preach the Gospel of Christ, and now he reflected on his experience. Things had not always gone so smoothly. Paul had experienced a lot of rejection and a lot of suffering, all for the cause of Christ. But this is what he says about that. He writes: “*That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions and in difficulties. For, when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Cor. 12:10).

“Weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties”? Is this how God’s prophet ought to be treated? No, of course not. But it comes with the territory when you bring a message that a lot of people don’t want to hear. They will hate you for it. They will mistreat you, beat you up and persecute you. That’s what had happened to Paul. But it did not stop him from preaching because Paul had a promise that was greater than the persecution. Paul had a Saviour who was stronger than the suffering, and so do all of us.

It is our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Jesus has taken the big suffering for us. Jesus has taken the punishment for our sins upon the cross. By His blood, shed on the cross, we are forgiven. When the Son of God died, His death covered everything. All our guilt has been taken away. And when this same Jesus rose from the dead, and He shared that resurrection victory with you in your baptism⁴, *that changes everything.* It puts any persecution into perspective. It puts our sufferings here in this life into the big picture of salvation and eternal joy. This is why Paul could say, “*That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions and in difficulties. For, when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Cor. 12:10). We have that same confidence in Christ.

And how we need it! For now, we come to twenty-first-century Australia, and keeping that in mind, how pertinent are these words today: “**They and their fathers have been in revolt against Me to this very day.** ⁴ **They are impudent and stubborn children.**” There are no truer words today to describe our nation. For the most part, the people of this country are not listening to God’s Word. They are rejecting the message of repentance and faith. Our country has gone crazy. The brainwashing, the indoctrination, has been so thorough from all the levels of our society. Television, movies, celebrities, the

¹ Luke 4:28-30

² *shuv* (to return) and *nacham* (to feel sorrow).

³ *metanoia*

⁴ Romans 6:3

entertainment industry, the media, officials in our government, corporations, public education - all of them rail against the Word of God, despise God's Word, and rebel against it. And of course, when they reject God's Word, they reject God's messengers and the church that is faithful to God's Word.

People do not want to hear that what God calls sin is sin. They hate that. They call evil good, and good they call evil. Speaking through another of His prophets, this time Isaiah, God had said how horrible it will be for such people.⁵ In our nation, we have people rejoicing because they can now legally marry their same-sex partner. Women can have abortions, and already in some states, assisted dying is legal. Queensland will soon pass this law as well. What are abominations before God is now the law of the land, and how terrible it is that so many of our fellow countrymen do not have a problem with this.

What they do have a problem with is *us*. We are the bigots and the homophobes. They take offence at us. So get ready for persecution. How long before it is legislated what can be preached from the pulpit in churches. How long before churches are silenced. The God-haters have the church in their line of sight, and things could very well get worse, if they ever get better.

So we must be ready. We must not let this stuff surprise us or get us down. Suffering for the sake of Christ has always been the church's experience. In some ways, we've had it pretty easy here in Australia for a long time, but that looks to be changing.

But what does not change is God's Word, both His Law and His Gospel. It continues to be preached, and as for those in the world, **“whether they listen or refuse to listen - for they are a rebellious family — they will, nevertheless, realise that a prophet has been among them.”** The word “realise” is used here in its full biblical sense: the God-given realisation of the truthfulness of the Word faithfully spoken by His messenger. The knowledge of God comes through His prophetic Word. For those who do hear the Word and repent, we rejoice, but for those who hear and do not repent, the day will still come, unfortunately too late for them, when they will have to acknowledge that all that the Word of God spoken by His faithful prophets is true.

Our prayer must always be that the Lord will continue to send messengers into the world to proclaim His Word. In the meantime, our Lord promises to be with us through whatever hard times we endure, whether from persecution or from any other suffering we experience.

Dear friends, in this world - and now, even in our nation - we continue to proclaim the same message that was given to all the Lord's prophets to proclaim. By God's grace, let us ask the Lord to continue to use us to bring this saving Word to others and rejoice in the work He has given us to do. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord of all power and grace, since Your eyes watch over the righteous and Your ears listen to their cries, hear our prayers as we come before You in gratitude and praise for all Your mercies.

We remember our great sinfulness before You, O Lord, and confess it with repentant hearts. Do not treat us as we deserve, but forgive us because of Your limitless love, that we may experience anew the joy of Your salvation and always live to Your praise.

We thank You for the daily miracles of Your care and love. Help us to realise always that You open Your hand and satisfy the needs of all Your creation and fill our lives with everything good, and make us thankful people.

We praise You especially for the gift of Your Son Jesus Christ, whom You have sent to be the Saviour of the world. Grant that we may believe in Him with all our hearts, honour Him as our Lord, and live under Him in the kingdom He has established. Help us to obey His words eagerly, to love Him truly, and to serve Him joyfully.

Continue to enlighten our lives by Your Holy Spirit, so that they may produce the abundant fruits of righteousness. Enable us to grow in knowledge of Your truth, in self-control in our lives. Give us a firm faith, pious minds, pure hearts, affection and sympathy for all our fellow-Christians, and love for all people.

Raise up pastors who will be true fishers of men. Help all Your people to put aside human opinions and selfish concerns, and to follow Your Son wherever He leads them. Give unity of spirit to Your people. Uphold those Christians who are suffering for the sake of their faith; and give them strength and courage.

⁵ Isaiah 5:20

We pray for the nations of the earth. Put down tyranny and terrorism. Raise up leaders who acknowledge You and Your will. Bless our country Australia. Lead its people pursue all that is good, and to put aside all that is evil. Frustrate the designs of those who want to promote murder through abortion and euthanasia.

Hear the cry of the suffering. Help them in body and spirit, and save them for Your mercy's sake. And, as we are only pilgrims in this world, guide and keep us, and bring us all at last to our heavenly home.

Receive these prayers, which we offer in the name of the author of life, Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The 6th Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 2:1-5

¹ He told me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet, that I may speak to you!"

² The Spirit entered me when He spoke to me and set me on my feet, and I heard Him speaking to me. ³ He told me: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to the rebellious nations that have rebelled against Me. They and their fathers have been in revolt against Me to this very day. ⁴ They are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall tell them: 'This is what the Lord GOD has said.' ⁵ As for them, whether they listen or refuse to listen - for they are a rebellious family — they will, nevertheless, realise that a prophet has been among them."

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

¹ I must boast. There is nothing to be gained by it, but I shall go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago — whether in his body, I do not know or outside of the body, I do not know, God knows. Such a man was caught up to the third heaven. ³ I know that a man like that — whether in his body or without his body, I do not know, God knows — ⁴ was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible Words, which are not permissible for a human being to speak. ⁵ About a man like that I shall boast but shall not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. ⁶ For, if I want to boast, I shall not be a fool. For I shall be telling the truth. However, I am sparing you, to prevent anyone from thinking more of me than he sees I am or than when he hears something from me. ⁷ Therefore, to keep me from becoming proud because of these surpassingly great revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to plague me, that I might not become proud. ⁸ About this, I begged the Lord three times, that it would leave me. ⁹ Nevertheless, He told me: "My grace is enough for you. For My power is made complete when

you are weak." Therefore, I shall boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions and in difficulties. For, when I am weak, then I am strong.

Mark 6:1-13

¹ Then Jesus went away from there and came to His hometown and His disciples followed Him. ² When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue. Many who heard Him were amazed. They asked, "Where did this Man get these things? What is this wisdom given to Him, that His hands are doing such miracles? ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters also here with us?"

They took offence at Him.

⁴ However, Jesus began to tell them, "A prophet is not without honour, except in his hometown, among his relatives and in his family."

⁵ He could not perform any miracle there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.

⁶ He was amazed at their unbelief. Then He went all around in the villages and taught.

⁷ Jesus called the Twelve to Him, began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits.

⁸ He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff — no bread, no bag, no money in their belts,

⁹ but to wear sandals. He told them, "Do not put on two tunics!" ¹⁰ He also told them, "Wherever you go into a house, stay there until you leave that place! ¹¹ Moreover, if any place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake off the dust that is under your feet, as a testimony against them!"

¹² They went out and preached that people should repent.

¹³ They also drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with olive-oil and healed them.