

Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Pentecost (B), Proper 9  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania  
Ezekiel 2:1-5; Psalm 123, II Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

**J. J. !**

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to  
come! ✠ Amen.

*[The LORD said to the Prophet Ezekiel]:  
“Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel . . . .”  
-- Ezekiel 2:3a*

*They said [of Jesus in His home congregation]:  
“Where did this man get all this? . . . Then Jesus said to  
them, ‘Prophets are not without honor, except in their  
hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own  
house.’ . . . And He was amazed at their unbelief.”*

*-- Mark 5:4a,6*

In our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America there is this policy that is usually referred to as the ‘call process.’ Those two words refer to the way Congregations and Pastors are hooked up as partners in mission to people in the surrounding community and in the care and nurture of members of the Congregation through the preaching and teaching of God’s Word in Scripture and the administration of God’s Word in the Sacraments. God’s Word, as Lutherans understand it, correctly, is Jesus Christ, the eternal God become human for all time, the Word of God

incarnate in our own flesh and blood, the Word of God speaking our own language, *but not necessarily saying what we want to hear.*

That was the case that Sabbath in Nazareth, when the people with whom Jesus had grown up at first liked what they heard, but then were offended when they considered the source. Was He not, according to Matthew ‘the carpenter, according to Mark ‘the carpenter’s son’ or according to Luke ‘the son of Joseph’ and, oh yes, in all three Synoptic Gospels, ‘*Mary’s son*’? Was he not getting considerably ‘above his raisin’,’ as the people of God of another time, in another place are sometimes heard to say?

Thus had the People of God ever complained and objected, throughout the history of God’s people Israel, for there has ever been, is and will be but *one* God and one *Word* of God, just as there has been, is and ever will be one *people* of God, whether of God’s Old First or New Second Covenant, a people who differs very little from century to century, from place to place or, as every Rabbi and Pastor knows, from congregation to congregation. All of them are part of Israel, *Yish-ra-El*, that is, that collective ‘*strong-man-of-God*,’ still *struggling* with God,

*wrestling* with God just like Jacob of old, *arguing* with God and taking issue with all called and sent to speak for God then, and now.

The ‘call process’ was a little different during the days of the Babylonian Captivity, when Ezekiel was called by the LORD and sent by the LORD, though there were similarities. Then and there, just as in today’s ELCA (that’s code for ‘Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,’ in case you were wondering), the candidate was given the name of the congregation or mission field. Ezekiel was not being considered for a call to proselytize among the Babylonians or the Medes or the Persians. ‘I am sending you to the people of Israel, DOT-DOT-DOT’ said the LORD. The ellipses in that declarative sentence contained what are termed the ‘call documents’ today, the so-called ‘profile’ of the congregation or mission field, and what a profile it was! The people to whom Ezekiel was to be sent, his *own* people, are described as *what?*: “. . . a nation of rebels who have rebelled against [God]; they and their ancestors have transgressed against [God] to this very day. The descendants [that is, those with whom Ezekiel is actually going to have to work] are impudent and stubborn. [God] is sending [Ezekiel] to them

[with orders to] say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD God!’ Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them” (Ezekiel 2:3-5). Unlike today, the candidate is not at liberty to return the ‘profile’ to synod headquarters in the hope of what is called ‘a better match.’ And lo, if you care to read further in Ezekiel, you will find that the people to whom Ezekiel was sent, his *own* people, *people just like himself*, lived up to their profile down to the last detail. They were indeed rebellious. They, especially the descendants actually *liked* living in luxurious captivity in beautiful Babylon—nothing like slavery in Egypt!—and they did *not* want to hear about repentance, turning around to live before the God of their fathers, the God of the covenant with Abraham and Moses, and they did *not* want to hear about returning home to Israel and to the broken walls and destroyed Temple of Jerusalem. They did *not* want to listen to Ezekiel, but that did not stop Ezekiel from proclaiming the Word of God among them and, ultimately, it did not prevent them from hearing and believing that Word.

Today's American Lutheran Assistants to the Bishops would *never* pass on a congregational profile like that to a prospective candidate for call, because, if they were to be so honest, they would have to do the same for the call committee of the Congregation getting ready to interview a candidate. I say that because, if the candidate really *were* that 'quality candidate' Assistants to the Bishops like to offer to call committees, the candidate's profile would have to read something like this: '(1) is just as selfish and stubborn as you at times; (2) someone you may think you like at first but whom you will grow very tired of as time goes by; (3) tastelessly committed to proclaiming God's Word of Law and judgment to the self-satisfied, and God's Word of Gospel, of forgiveness and hope to those who, quite frankly, don't seem to deserve it, to the admittedly imperfect, to the moral failures and perpetual screw-ups and people who, in social and material terms, seem to be rather needy, as well as to those who seem to habitually inhabit those 'boundary regions' of life; (4) *obstinately* determined to see the Congregation and its worship as something *great* and terribly, *terribly* important, as participating in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic

Church of all the ages and, what is more, *confident* that the members of the Congregation are really *interested* in being that Great or Wider Church.’ ‘You will wonder,’ our unfortunately only hypothetical Bishop’s Assistant will add, ‘where this Pastor gets all this stuff. “Does she just make it up?” you will ask yourselves, wondering quietly to yourselves and very, *very* quietly before God, ‘Why can’t the Pastor just leave us alone and let us be what we thought we were?’

Of course, that cuts both ways. Pastors today resist changing into the people among whom they serve just as much as those Twelve or, later, Seventy Galileans must have dreaded but eventually accepted becoming the people of that world that first heard the Gospel, from Palestine to Rome to Spain, from Egypt to Ethiopia, from Armenia to India. But *that* is hardly *news* to us in this covenant of Pastor and Congregation, in this fourth summer of our life together, and it will not come as news regardless how many years we are blessed to labor and to struggle together. What *is* news is the *Good* News of Jesus Christ, the news that God’s Kingdom has come very near to us, *and is already here*, the news that lives bent over and crippled in bondage to sin can be

healed, redeemed, reborn in hope and in joy through Him Who loves us so much that He chooses to *be* one of us and to speak to us in language we can understand, sometimes all too well, thanks be to God! ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who love us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to Our God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.

**S. D. G. !**