

Ezekiel 2:1-5 Ps. 1232Cor. 12:2-10

Mk. 6:1-13 (Mt. 9:35,10:1,9-11,14 & Mt. 13:53-58; Lk. 4:16-30)

May the words on my lips, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you,
O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

"Where then did this man get all this?" (Mk 6:2b) To answer this rhetorical question proffered by the naysayers in Jesus hometown from Mark's account of this gospel drama, it might help to take a look-back at Ezekiel's plight. For when the Lord God said, "Stand up on your feet mortal, and I will speak with you!" It wasn't until the Spirit entered into him and stood him upright, that he heard God speaking. It was the action initiated by the Holy Spirit, that enabled the prophet to hear and respond to God's call, to go, to be sent, to a rebellious nation and speak the prophetic words of the Lord.

To be clear, a prophet is not in the prediction-making business but calls out in no uncertain terms, what needs to change among the people, and what will happen if they don't change. Think of Jonah and Ninevah. But in that case, Ninevah did change. Jonah? Remains to be seen.

Another place where we have to be careful, is in expectation of results. If the words didn't 'take', or if they did, that's not the point. If it was 'mission accomplished' or 'mission impossible' that's not within the prophetic scope. As long as the prophet did as commanded, the rest is in God's hands.

We heard this theme of receptivity, not too long ago, in the parable of the secret life of the seed. The seed is cast, seemingly randomly. It finds its way down into the earth. How it grows – what it will be; is in God's hands. Receptivity is further exemplified in part two of today's gospel sequence as Jesus commissions his disciples to go – transformed from 'mere' disciples to apostles – sent.

Their vulnerability is emphasized by their dependency not only on God's action but by the hospitality of those to whom they reach out. Should receptivity be found lacking, it's incumbent upon them to let go and let God; symbolically expressed by shaking the dust off their sandals. I can tell you that I have personally benefitted from that wisdom many times throughout my life.

Obviously, if Jesus is incredulous at the reception or more accurately the lack thereof, awaiting him in his hometown, a similar fate potentially awaits his followers. But does this mean STOP! Do not pass Go. Do not collect \$200? In the game of monopoly, the object is to win at all costs.

If that were the Divine playbook, wouldn't God's prophets be compelled to conquer and divide? Wouldn't they beat the opposition down? If our God were a win-at-all-costs minded sovereign, a twist-your-arm sort of Lord, wouldn't God's prophets wield a mighty word and sword? Unfortunately, some self-designated prophets have.

But that's not what we encounter through Jesus. No doubt he's hurt and frustrated that nobody who knows him is receptive and open enough to let God's healing grace enter in. And yet, instead of sulking and pressing matters, he turns his attention to other places that need healing.

In Luke's edition of Jesus' Rejection at Nazareth, Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Those words should resonate for us as Americans as we celebrate Independence Day, our freedom, our duty to serve – and to consider how we serve the Lord.

As Jesus read those words, you could have heard a pin drop. And then he dropped words on the floor that got him run out of town and nearly thrown off a cliff if he hadn't slipped through their grasp. "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

A favorable reception? Not so much. My guess is that you wouldn't be offended by those words if you were among those poor, powerless, captive, and oppressed. And recovery of vision? Who among us, at a minimum, doesn't need our vision adjusted, to see with gospel eyes? But the people took offense. To take Offense is also translated as 'to stumble'. The inability to be receptive to God's word and spirit, is to cause one to stumble. Praise be that the Spirit props us up again.

His hometown peeps, stumbled at his words. They tripped over their closed mindset, unable to accept this new and improved Jesus – divinely anointed, God's chosen beloved son, not merely Mary's son, or the Joseph the carpenter's son. Reception was lukewarm at best.

But did Jesus forcefeed the people? No. Our God is more of a come-you-who hunger, who thirst; and I will feed you with the bread of life and quench your parched voice with living water. And I will restore your soul with my own blood. I promise.

And how does Jesus do this? Not by a top-down hierarchal corporate approach, But from a bottom-up grassroots partnership. Jesus straight-up tells us, "I'm gonna send you out like sheep among wolves." (Mt. 10:16)

When God calls, it might sound something like this African American Spiritual popularized by Johnny Cash among others:

"Children go where I send thee.
How shall I send thee?
I'm gonna send thee 2x2, 2 for Paul and Silas,
1 for the little bitty baby,
who was born, born, born in Bethlehem.

Children go where I send thee.
How shall I send thee?
I'm gonna send thee 3x3, 3 for the Hebrew children,
2 for Paul and Silas,
1 for the little bitty baby,
who was born, born, born in Bethlehem.

Children go where I send thee.
How shall I send thee?
I'm gonna send thee 4x4, 4 for the 4 that stood at the door
3 for the Hebrew children,
2 for Paul and Silas,
1 for the little bitty baby,
who was born, born, born in Bethlehem.

Children go where I send thee.
How shall I send thee?
I'm gonna send thee 5x5, 5 for the gospel preachers
4 for the 4 that stood at the door
3 for the Hebrew children,
2 for Paul and Silas,
1 for the little bitty baby,
who was born, born, born in Bethlehem.

Children go where I send thee.
How shall I send thee?
I'm gonna send thee 12x12, 12 for the 12 apostles
11 x 11 that couldn't get to heaven
10 for the 10 commandments
9 for the 9 all dressed so fine
8 for the 8 that stood at the gate
7 for the 7 that didn't get to heaven

6 for 6 that couldn't get fixed
5 for the gospel preachers
4 for the 4 that stood at the door
3 for the Hebrew children
2 for Paul and Silas
1 for the little, bitty baby
who was born, born born at Bethlehem!
(also check out Home Free feat. Kenny Rogers)

As Jesus sends the 12 out, 2 x 2, according to Matthew, they are warned to "Stay alert. It's hazardous work... you'll be like a sheep running through a wolf pack, so don't call attention to yourselves. Be as cunning as a snake and inoffensive as a dove. Don't be naïve. And when all goes wrong and you're hauled in front of the authorities... recognize this is a good thing, you've given me a platform for preaching the Kingdom news! And don't worry about what you'll say or how you'll say it. The right words will be there! The Spirit will supply the words." (The MSG)

And that's how it works my friends! Jesus calls us as the Lord called Amos out as a dresser of Sycamore trees, and Ezekiel and Jeremiah, Isaiah, Moses, and and and you and me! Not only do we not have to carry all sorts of baggage, we don't have to get our apologetics straight, or defense made ready, or case well-honed.

We are simply called, as ourselves to be fertile, receptive ground for the Holy Spirit, Who will stand us up, whisper in our ear and heart; Who will look through our eyes and reach out with our hands, Who will move through the villages by our feet, in partnership with each of us; listening, learning, loving, believing, praying.

The weight of God's mission is not placed squarely on our shoulders, to 'make something happen'. Prophets need not be superheroes, but just ordinary folks like you and me. There is no deficiency that the Holy Spirit cannot overcome.

St. Paul eloquently attests to his own weakness, of a thorn in his flesh to which he appeals 3 times to the Lord for it's removal but the appeal is denied. For the Lord declares, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

We can trust that the Holy Spirit is ever at work, operating behind the scenes, implementing God's plan, or as I prefer to say - God's dream and desire... for all of creation and all of God's creatures, humans too. The same grace that empowered the prophets before us, that stood Ezekiel on his feet, helped him to hear the Lord is the same grace that carries us in hope and awe of God's healing, and casting out of demons of all kinds, and restoring creation as God intends it. May we be strengthened as we are sent.
Amen.

Amma Susan