

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – July 12, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Ezekiel 2:1-5 (NIV)

He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." 2) As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. 3) He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. 4) The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' 5) And whether they listen or fail to listen--for they are a rebellious people--they will know that a prophet has been among them.

Dear Friends in Christ;

Perhaps some of you may recall the old TV series *Mission Impossible* – in which a secret government agent was given special instructions for his missions on a self-destructing audio tape. I've got a video clip of the opening segments of one the shows that will show everyone what I'm talking about.

In some ways, it must have seemed to Ezekiel that God was giving him an impossible mission – "**Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. 4) The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn...**" But, this was not Mission Impossible for Ezekiel – rather it was Mission Possible because

Theme: God Equips His Messengers to Serve His Church

1. He prepares the messenger to listen to his Word
2. He shows the messenger the scope of his work
3. He assures the messenger of the Lord's effectiveness

As we consider how God equipped Ezekiel to serve the rebellious Jewish exiles in Babylon we will be reminded that Christ still sends and equips messengers to serve him and his Church today. The Apostle Paul assures us: "**So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...**" (Ephesians 4:11-12 NIV).

In the TV show, *Mission Impossible*, Jim Phelps received his mission in a rather interesting manner. The way in which the Lord called Ezekiel to his mission however was even more interesting. When Ezekiel, the priest, was 30 years, old he saw visions of God while he was among the Jewish exiles by the Kebar River in Babylon. In one of those visions, Ezekiel saw some rather interesting angelic creatures – creatures with 4 faces. **Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. They each had two wings spreading out upward, each wing touching that of the creature on either side; and each had two other wings covering its body.** (Ezekiel 1:10-11 NIV) Later in Ezekiel, these creatures are identified as Cherubim. Interestingly they remind us of the Angelic beings that the Apostle John saw while he was in exile on the island of Patmos.

Above the creatures, Ezekiel saw a vault or a covering and above the vault, there was a throne surrounded by the "likeness of the glory of the Lord." Upon seeing this, Ezekiel fell face down to the ground and heard a voice saying to him: "**Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.**" 2) **As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.**

God took the initiative to call Ezekiel into his service and to prepare him for ministry in the Lord's Church. Interesting, when God described the mission he had in mind for Ezekiel he didn't give him the option to choose to accept it. The Lord didn't ask Ezekiel if he was interested in being a prophet or if he wanted to talk with the Almighty one – God simply gave Ezekiel his mission. God's Word would make him what God wanted him to be.

God told him to stand up and then sent the Spirit into Ezekiel to enable him to stand before him. (We'll talk more about that in just a second.) The Spirit opened Ezekiel's ears to hear and to respond. What a gracious act on the Lord's part – gracious in calling and strengthening Ezekiel but even more gracious in allowing an underserving sinner like Ezekiel to stand before him. There is no one who deserves to stand in the presence of the Lord as the Psalmist reminds us with this question; **If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?** (Psalm 130:3 NIV)

This same grace is evident in our lives as well. God in grace has sent his Holy Spirit to us through his Word and Sacrament to call us to faith, to forgive our sins and to call us into his service. In his grace as we have already mentioned the Lord Jesus calls and sends pastors to serve his Church.

So just how does the Lord call workers to serve in his church today? When the Lord called me to serve as the pastor of God Shepherd, he didn't call me in a vision. But, non-the-less the Holy Spirit was active in that process. The leaders of this congregation were given a list of trained and qualified individuals by the District President who had carefully and prayerfully considered the needs of this congregation. Then the voters of the congregation asked for the Lord's blessings as they selected one of the individuals on that list to call as their next pastor. Sometimes it takes a while for the voters to reach a consensus but ultimately a unanimous vote is cast for one individual who is then notified that he has been called as the pastor of the congregation. An official letter is sent describing the congregation and its ministries and the man who receives the call begins a prayerful consideration of where he can best serve the Lord's Church.

Remember how I mentioned that Ezekiel did not seek out the Lord and volunteer to go as the Lord's prophet. The same is true today in the calling process that we use in our congregations. "The call seeks the man – the man doesn't seek the call," is a phrase that I recall from my days back at the seminary. The men whose names appear on a call list don't volunteer for a particular position or call – they are most often unaware of the fact that their names are even being used on a call list. There is comfort in that fact knowing that when a pastor receives a call it is the Lord's answer to a prayer on the part of the congregation who has called him.

The Lord didn't give Ezekiel a choice – he simply commissioned him as his prophet. Today when a student graduates from the Seminary, he is simply assigned to serve in a congregation. However if a congregation calls a man who is already serving as in another congregation to be their pastor – that individual will need to decide with the Lord's blessings whether to accept the call and move to a new area of service in the Lord's Church or to return the call and to continue to serve in his present congregation. As a part of the deliberation process, the pastor will speak to his present congregation, to other pastors, and to leaders in the congregation that has extended the new call to him. Most importantly, he speaks to God asking him to lead and guide him to a God pleasing decision.

Many times the "accompanying call letter" describes the scope of the pastor's work in a congregation. However the scope of this work will always be in keeping with the Lord's will and Word. We speak of this kind of call as a mediate call – the call comes through the "medium" of the congregation as it prayerfully calls the pastor. The key factor in this process is that God is working in and through the congregation or calling body.

Ezekiel's call was different. It was an immediate call – God himself spoke to Ezekiel and shared with him the scope of his ministry. **He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious**

nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. 4) The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.'

The Lord was sending Ezekiel with his Word to the rebellious and sinful nation of Israel. Rebellion and revolt was in their blood. Just as their ancestors before them had done so the Israelite's of Ezekiel's generation had transgressed against the Lord. They knew and understood the limits their heavenly had placed on them but they tested him, they pushed him to the limit and beyond. They rejected his authority. They refused his gracious words. They had broken their trust with him and his promises and refused to respect him. In their obstinance and stubbornness, they were not interested in turning away from their sinful actions and attitudes.

In Fatherly love for his wayward children, the Lord was sending Ezekiel with his message to this people and holding out the hope that they can still repent and return to his family. Ezekiel was to proclaim what the Lord said to him faithfully without regard for what the Israelites might say about him or think about his message. If they rejected him, they would be rejecting the Lord.

When Jesus commissioned 72 of his followers to go and preach he told them much the same thing. **"Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me."** (Luke 10:16 NIV) Prior to saying this, Jesus had told his disciples that there would be places where they would be welcomed and places where they would be rejected. He said that he was sending them out like lambs among wolves. (cf. Luke 10:3) He also gave them the message: "The kingdom of God is near." (cf. Luke 10:9, 11)

The scope of Ezekiel's ministry and the ministry of the 72 is similar to the God-given scope of ministry which the Lord of the church gives to those whom he calls today. Neither I, nor the members of this congregation are perfect. All of us need to be reminded of God's faithfulness to us and our unfaithfulness to him. All of us are in need of God's grace and mercy. All of us need to hear and believe the Word of the Lord.

Still today, God equips his messengers to serve his church by showing them the scope of their work. It is vital for harmony between a pastor and the members of his congregation to understand what it is that the Lord expects of those whom he sends to serve his flock. The Apostle Paul shared the Lord's expectations with Timothy as he outlined the scope of those who serve the Lord's New Testament Church. **Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. 3) For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4) They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5) But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.** (2 Timothy 4:2-5 NIV)

FAITHFULNESS to the WORD – that is the primary scope of the Pastor's call today. The promise to be faithful to the Word is the major part of the promises a pastor makes when he is installed as a pastor. In return, the congregation promises to listen to and follow that same Word.

When the Lord called Ezekiel, he equipped him for ministry by assuring him of the Lord's effectiveness. **And whether they listen or fail to listen--for they are a rebellious people--they will know that a prophet has been among them.**

Ezekiel was to go with the Word of the Lord when he went to conduct his ministry among the captives of Israel in Babylon. The Lord would not judge his effectiveness on whether or not the people liked him or even on if they listened to him. He would be judged on his faithfulness. It would be up to the Lord to provide

the results. Ezekiel's task was to faithfully apply the Word of the Lord to the people he served. He was to rely on the strength of the Lord.

The same is true today. It's God's will that his pastor rely not on their own personalities or skills but that they humbly come to God's people with the Word of the Lord – not human opinion or rhetoric. The Lord assured the prophet Isaiah that his word would accomplish his purposes. **As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, (11) so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.** (Isaiah 55:10-11 NIV) That was true for Isaiah, for Ezekiel, and for God's messengers today.

The Lord's messengers are sent and called to work among sinful people – calling them to repentance and proclaiming the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. It might seem as if theirs is an impossible task. In the *Mission Impossible* TV series, Jim Phelps and his agents had to go it alone. Thankfully that's not true for those the Lord calls as his messengers. The Lord's strength turns an impossible mission into mission accomplished.

God's Equips His Messengers to Serve His Church

1. He prepares the messenger to listen to his Word
2. He shows the messenger the scope of his work
3. He assures the messenger of the Lord's effectiveness

Our focus today has been on the public ministry and on the work of called workers. But the same Lord who equips pastors to serve in his church uses the work of those pastors to equip believers for their service to the Lord. My dear friends as you serve the Lord you also can rest assured of the Lord's blessings on your service as you faithfully hear and live in keeping with the Word. Amen.