

Speak My Words to Rebellious People

Ezekiel 2:1-3:4 (NIV84)

¹ 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 fathers 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 house—they will know that a prophet has been among them. ⁶ And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house. ⁷ You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. ⁸ But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." ⁹ Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, ¹⁰ which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. ¹ And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." ² So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. ³ Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. ⁴ He then said to me: "Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them.

"Preach you the Word and plant it home." (Christian Worship 544) One of our members reminds me a fairly regular basis that our hymns are mini sermons onto themselves, not just music. How true that is for this hymn penned by Martin H. Franzmann, a Lutheran pastor noted for his stance on the Bible being God's Word without error when so many would say otherwise. His lyrics, "Preach you the Word and plant it home To those who like or like it not," have applied not just in our 21st century or his 20th century, but all throughout time as people spoke the Word of God. As Paul said to Timothy in our second lesson, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men 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." (2 Timothy 4:2-3)

All three of our Bible readings today are about people preaching the Word and planting it home. Our first lesson was God's commissioning of Ezekiel to go and speak his words to the Israelites. In our second lesson Paul charged Timothy with keeping to the holy Scriptures as he served as a pastor. In our Gospel reading Jesus preached and taught in the synagogue of his hometown.

Not only are all three of our readings about preaching God's Word, but each one is also about planting it home to those who like or like it not. Jesus was rejected as a preacher in his hometown because they knew him as nothing more than a carpenter. He wasn't some trained rabbi or spiritual guru, and the people took offense at him because of this. Paul told Timothy that people will not put up with sound doctrine, with what God's Word actually says.

Then you have Ezekiel. God was up front with Ezekiel. He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn." (chapter 2 verses 3-4) The word "rebel" is used 8 times in this section. Not only are the Israelites rebellious, but God also calls them obstinate and stubborn. Concerning his ministry, God gives Ezekiel this charge: "You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious." (chapter 2 verse 7) Ezekiel's call from God lines up nicely with Franzmann's hymn, "Preach you the Word and plant it home To those who like or like it not."

While preparing for this sermon I pulled out my call letter to Light of the Valley. Although I was reminded that my list of duties here is extensive, I did not see the specific, "Preach God's Word to rebellious, stubborn, obstinate people." Although I don't know of any pastors who are looking for that charge, every pastor knows that as you reach out with God's Word, there will be those who are stubborn, obstinate, and rebellious to it. There will be people who blow you off, pondering if truth can ever be known. There will be people to slam the door in your face. There will be people who say, "I don't discuss religion or politics."

Should this surprise us? We know our own hearts, what we once were. "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another." (Titus 3:3) We were disobedient. We had rebellious hearts, but then our hearts were completely changed by the message of God's Word. He told us that we were saved from our own rebellion, that he sent his Son who lived in perfect obedience to God's laws. He did this for us so that we are now forgiven.

At times, though, that rebellious heart still comes out and shows itself even as we struggle against it. "I know what God's Word says, but I'm just not ready to give that up yet." "I know what God's Word says, but that's too hard to do; I can't do it." "I know I should share my faith, but they aren't going to listen. They going to make fun of me. They might even try to get me fired for sharing my faith."

Thank God we called a pastor to go preach to those stubborn, obstinate, rebellious people so that we don't have to, right? Well, yes, your pastor is called to tend not only the flock that is here, this specific congregation, but he is also called to reach out to the unchurched and unbelievers of this area. You pay him to dedicate full time efforts to these tasks. However, does that mean that God exempts you from preaching the Word and planting it home? Does it mean that you never have to speak to another person with a rebellious, stubborn, obstinate heart?

God says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) God has called you to preach his Word as well and plant it home to those who like or like it not. What you may not realize is that you may have been doing this.

Maybe you shared your faith with a boyfriend or girlfriend, a spouse. Maybe you, as a parent, grandparent, or great-grandparent, told the little ones Bible stories, taught them how to pray, brought them to church with you. Maybe you shared what you believe, shared what God has done for you, with a friend, a neighbor, or a coworker struggling through rough times. You shared your faith. You were their first point of contact for that person with God. You preached the Word and planted it home to those who like or like it not. When we share with people that "This is what the Sovereign LORD says," (chapter 2 verse 4), we are fulfilling our calling as the royal priesthood of God even if they don't like what they hear and they rebel against it.

Being part of that royal priesthood is scary. Even with friends and family members, they can reject your faith and it makes us feel like they are rejecting us as a whole. Their rebellious heart may lurch out at us, insult us, disregard what we believe. These are the briers and thorns all around us, like they were for Ezekiel. This is like sitting among scorpions. They can harm you, make your life difficult with their stinging words and comments against the Word we treasure so dearly. Although not fatal, their words and actions cut me, hurt me.

How can I have the courage to preach the Word and plant it home even though these people may not like it and actually rebel against it? God gives Ezekiel the solution. Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." (chapter 3 verse 3)

Our courage to fulfill our calling as the royal priesthood of God, preaching the Word and planting it home for those who like or like it not, is to fill up on God's Word. Ezekiel consumed the scroll, the one with the title of lament and mourning and woe. Yes, as he consumed the scroll, he had to come face to face with his rebellious heart. But as he consumed all of what the Sovereign LORD said, he also heard about the forgiveness God had won for him by his obedience for Ezekiel and for all people. Ezekiel was filled with the Lord's compassion and patience for rebellious souls. This is why God's Word tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth. (chapter 3 verse 3) In consuming God's Word, the Holy Spirit lifted him up to his feet, strengthening him to stand and preach his Word. (chapter 2 verse 2)

That same Word which tasted as sweet as honey and strengthened Ezekiel strengthens us as well. That's why we need to be eating it, consuming it, not just once a week, but as often as we can, that we make time to be filled up with God's Word. It gives us everything we need for a healthy, growing Christian. As Paul said to Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) It has all that we need to be able to say what the Sovereign LORD says, even to stubborn, obstinate, rebellious people.

God has called you to preach the Word and plant it home like Ezekiel did, like Timothy did, like Jesus did. God has called you from your rebellious heart to share his sweet word with others who need to be rescued from their rebellious lives. To fulfill your calling, continue consuming the Word of God. Take it in, and it will build you up. Then, take up this challenge: think of at least one person you know who does not believe in God - one of these stubborn, obstinate, rebellious people. Pray that the Holy Spirit would strengthen you to stand on what God says. Pray for an opportunity to share God's sweet Word with that person. Let God's Word consume your fears about sharing his sweet message. Finally, as God said to Ezekiel, "Go now...and speak my words to them." (chapter 3 verse 4) Preach you the Word and plant it home to those who like or like it not. Amen.