

July 4, 2021
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 6:1-13 (Ezekiel 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 12:1-12)

REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Mark, the 6th chapter, with particular focus on verse 12:

“So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.” (Mark 6:12)

With the exception of Jesus, God has a perfect record of sending out sinful men to preach the message of repentance, that you turn away from your sinfulness and trust alone in God for salvation. It’s a difficult message to proclaim because it’s a difficult message to hear. The call to repentance often causes rejection. Many of God’s prophets sent to preach repentance were put to death. (cf: Luke 11:47–48)

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel likely didn’t know what he was getting into. God called him to deliver a difficult message. God sent him to his own people, the Israelites, to proclaim repentance. In arrogant stubbornness, the Israelites had continually sinned against God, rejected Him and deserved eternal damnation. But God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone, but desires they turn from sin and live. (cf: Ezekiel 18:32)

God sent the sinful Ezekiel as His mouthpiece. He was not to speak his own words but only the Words that God gave him to say. And God would hold him accountable. He was to proclaim God’s Word of judgement, that they would surely die for their iniquity unless they repent and turn from their wicked ways. (cf: Ezekiel 3:18–21) If they listened, God would have mercy and they would live. If they did not listen, God would pour out His wrath on them and they would die. (cf: Ezekiel 7:23-27) But they were an obstinate and stubborn people. The call to repentance is too difficult for them to hear and they not only reject the message, they reject the messenger. (cf: Ezekiel 3:7–10)

St Paul was a sinner just like Ezekiel. Paul trained at the feet of the best of the Pharisees (cf: Acts 22:3), took great pleasure in persecuting Christ’s Church, handing Christians over to be killed. (cf: Acts 22:4-5) But Jesus had different plans for Paul. Our Lord would appear to him on the road to Damascus. (cf: Acts 9:3–4) Three days later the Holy Spirit was poured out onto him and he was Baptized. (cf: Acts 9:17-19) God sent Him to be His mouthpiece and to preach to the Gentiles (cf: Acts 9:10-16). Paul didn’t know what he was getting into but God would show him how much he would suffer for his name’s sake. (cf: Acts 9:16)

Paul knew he was chief of sinners. (cf: 1 Timothy 1:15) He knew that nothing good dwelt inside of him. He couldn't understand his own actions. (cf: Romans 7:17-20) He once said:

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”
(Romans 7:24).

But still, God called him to preach. He didn't boast or brag about the visions that God had revealed to him. He knew that faith is not built upon emotional and mystical experiences. He preached a message of repentance, turning from one's sin, and trust in Jesus for salvation. (cf: Acts 17:30, 20:21; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10) And he was rejected at what seem like every turn. (cf: 2 Corinthians 11:23-29) But he boasted in his weakness and continued to preach Christ crucified for sinners. (1 Corinthians 1:23) He was merely God's mouthpiece. In his weakness, people came to faith by the divine power of the Word of God. (cf: Romans 10:17)

In our Gospel text, Jesus sends out His spokesmen, His twelve sinful disciples. He sent them two by two, giving them authority over the unclean spirits. (Mark 6:7). Our text says:

“So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.” (Mark 6:12)

There's an unassuming, but very important word right in the middle of verse seven. It's the word ***began***.

“... he called the twelve and began to send them out...” (Mark 6:7)

They were only the beginning of those being sent. Even today, Jesus still sends out His disciples, His pastors and under-shepherds, to be His mouthpiece. Pastors are trained in God's Word, and being ordained into the Office of the Holy Ministry, they are given the authority to proclaim His Holy Word and administer His Sacraments. They are given to Baptize and to teach all that Jesus has commanded, (cf: Matthew 28:19-20) forgiving the sins of the repentant, and withholding forgiveness from the unrepentant. (cf: John 20:22-23) They're given to:

“... preach the word... in season and out of season; [to] reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2).

Just like Ezekiel and Paul, pastors are sinners, wretched men, delivering the Word of God. And just like Ezekiel and Paul, pastors are rejected. They're not rejected because of who they are, but because of God's message given to them to preach. Even the sinless Jesus' own friends and neighbors took offense at Him.

During the 1,400 plus years since God had handed down His Holy Law on Mt Sinai, the Law had been corrupted with human understanding and the traditions of men. (cf: Mark 7:6-13) The religious leaders had turned the Law into a heavy burden which led the people astray. (cf: Matthew 23:2-4) They needed to be called to repentance. So, God sent a prophet greater than all who were sent before, His own Son, Jesus. (cf: Deuteronomy 18:15)

“[Jesus did] not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:32)

So, in our Gospel text, when Jesus began to teach in the synagogue, He likely began by proclaiming a proper understanding of God's good and Holy Law, how God desires man live before Him and how far we have had fallen short. God's Law accuses and crushes stone-cold

hearts so that you recognize your sin, fear God's wrath, come to repentance, confess your sin, turn from your evil ways, and live. (cf: Ezekiel 33:11)

He next likely proclaimed the full sweetness of His Holy Gospel to sooth the consciences of those crushed by the Law. It is the Good News that the Kingdom of God had come in the person of Christ, to win forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, by paying the wages of sin for all mankind.

It's a message woven through-out the Bible, the very words of Jesus:

"... repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15).

No one likes to be reprovved and rebuked. No one likes to be told that they're a sinner and if they don't repent and turn from their sin, they risk losing their faith and salvation. You and I take offense at God's Word and reject Him and whoever is proclaiming it.

Our sinful nature has done flips and twists trying to sugarcoat sin to make it appear acceptable. Lying has become "**stretching the truth.**" Cheating is "**bending the rules.**" Lusting is the "**admiration of the opposite sex.**" Gossiping is only "**harmless talk.**" Envy is "**appreciating what others have.**" Gluttony is "**lack of will power.**" Sexual perversion is "**a God-given alternate lifestyle.**" And when it comes to abortion and euthanasia, "**it's my body and my choice.**" No matter how much make-up and lipstick you put on it, what God calls sin is still sin.

You can reject the things in the Bible that you don't like. The government can write laws that are contrary to God's Word. You can claim that we live in a more enlightened time – that God's Word meant something completely different in the context of when it was written. But what God's Word calls a sin is still sin. It still leads to eternal death and damnation. You have God's promise when He says:

"I the Lord do not change..." (Malachi 3:6).

He says:

"⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40:8)

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Although you and I think we can – we cannot change the Word of God. And that's why God sends His messengers and preachers to speak, not man's wisdom but the wisdom and Word of God. The hammer of the Law must first crush your sinful heart before the sweet comfort of the Gospel can be applied. You must first realize that your sins have made you sick unto death before you can be restored to health by the Gospel. You must see the filthy rages of your unrighteousness, so that by the preaching of the Gospel, you are robed in the righteousness of Christ.

Whoever your pastor is, he's God's messenger. And like you, he's a sinner. But as long as he proclaims the Good News of Christ who came to seek and save the lost, (cf: Luke 19:10) was crucified for the forgiveness of your sins, raised from the grave for your justification, (cf: Romans 4:25) that's all that matters. He's just God's mouthpiece and under-shepherd. It's not the pastor's words – it's the Word of God.

Dear sinner, repent, turn from your sin, and believe the Gospel. Examine yourself, what you and done and have left undone according to the Ten Commandments and repent. Repent for ignoring how God desires you live before Him. Repent of not taking refuge in His Word, studying and meditating on Holy Scripture so that you know whether you're hearing the truth or human myths, listening to one of God's under-shepherds or to a wolf in sheep's clothing.

God sends pastors to preach His Word in season and out of season. When your stone-cold heart has been crushed and you turn in repentance and confess your sins, receive the absolution: In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you of all your sins in the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. While Jesus is the only sinless One to proclaim repentance:

"²¹ For our sake [God] made him to be sin... so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Your sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus suffering and death on your behalf. They're washed whiter than snow in the blood of the Lamb. (cf: Isaiah 1:18).

Your Savior Jesus Christ knew exactly what He was getting Himself into when He took on flesh and became man. He knew He would be rejected in His home town. He knew many would reject Him and His Word rejecting the forgiveness of sins that comes only through Him. He knew He would carry your griefs, your sorrows to the cross, and He would be cursed and spit at, beaten within an inch of His life, only to be spared so He could then be nailed to a cross, where He was pierced for your transgressions and crushed for your iniquities. (cf: Isaiah 53:4-5)

It was necessary that Christ die to save the world from their sins; to save you from your sins. And in His abundant love for you, He wouldn't have had it any other way. His death has brought you His peace and by His wounds, you have been healed.

Amen.

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