

BIBLE STUDY
June 28, 2021

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ezekiel 2: 2-5

Mark 6: 1-6

2 Corinthians 12: 7-10

1. Ezekiel 2: 2-5

- The Prophet Ezekiel preached to the Israelites while they were in exile. (Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem in retaliation for the rebellion of Jehoiakim. He appointed Zedekiah king and deported Jehoiakim and the royal family and the upper class of Jerusalem including Ezekiel to Babylon. His preaching was to convince them that their exile was in punishment for their not adhering to the covenant and not trusting God to protect them from foreign adversaries.
- The first chapter of Ezekiel sets the stage for the call of Ezekiel in chapter 2 by describing the heavenly court. He describes the cherubim on which rested the throne of God. The cherubim were in the image of four living creatures: a lion, an ox, an eagle and a human being. They were on wheels that went in every direction. Finally, he describes the throne of God and God depicted as a human king upon his throne. The language is fantastic and surreal to show that human minds and language cannot depict the glory of God.
- 2: 1: The voice of God summons Ezekiel to speak to him and addresses him as “son of man,” meaning a human person.
- 2: 2: The call of Ezekiel. The spirit (which is breath, wind, life) enters into him and lifts him up. He hears the voice of God.
- 2: 3: The prophet is being sent to Israel. They are described as being rebellious and in revolt against God since the beginning up to this very time.
- 2: 4: Ezekiel is being sent to these people who are “bold of face and stubborn of heart.” Ezekiel is to speak to them the message of God.
- 2: 5: They must choose whether they will listen or not, but one thing will be certain, they will know that a prophet has come to them.

2. Mark 6: 1-6

- After two remarkable miracles of the woman with a hemorrhage and the raising of Jairus’ daughter that displayed extraordinary faith, Jesus now encounters extraordinary lack of faith in his hometown of Nazareth.
- 6:1: Jesus goes with his disciples to Nazareth, his home town.
- 6:2: On the Sabbath, he goes to the synagogue and teaches. The people are astonished at his teaching. They wonder where he got all this wisdom and learning. They cannot understand how he has the power to heal and cast out demons. They seem to acknowledge that he does possess remarkable wisdom and power but they are unable to be open to its divine source.

- 6:3: In Jesus' time, there was no social mobility. One did not advance in social stature. A carpenter did not become a rabbi. You remained in the social status of your parents all your life. The townspeople think they know who he is because they know his family. It is unusual that he is described as the son of Mary and not the son of Joseph. This may reflect mark the evangelist's faith that Jesus is Son of God. The brothers and sisters of Jesus could be first cousins or step-brothers and sisters. They take offense at him. Their astonishment is not that of admiration but of contempt. They think he is being pretentious and over-reaching. Their familiarity with him as a native son blinds them to his divine sonship. Offense can also be translated "scandalized" or literally, he is a stumbling block to them. They cannot get by his humanity to see his role as prophet much less as Son of God.
- 6:4: Jesus quotes a proverb to describe his rejection by them. By it, he identifies with the prophets of Israel who were rejected by the people. This foreshadows his rejection which will lead to his death on the cross.
- 6:5: Their rejection of him and lack of faith in him prevents him from performing any miracle. Healing and expulsion of evil spirits requires faith on the part of the person being healed or set free. That he healed a few persons means that there were at least a few persons who did have faith.
- 6:6: Jesus is amazed at their lack of faith.
- "Progress in the spiritual life—growth in the spirit—almost always shows itself in the ability to recognize God more and more in the ordinary, the everyday. The great saints never ceased to be filled with wonder at the mysterious presence of God they constantly sensed all around them. The full meaning of the Incarnation is not only that the Son of God became a human being, but that he took human form in a town as ordinary and as insignificant and out of the way as Nazareth. The gospel invites us to identify and name the "Nazareth" in our won selves." Brenden Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel*, page 105.

3. 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10

- Paul was the recipient of mystical experiences in which he was given a vision of heaven. He mentions these experiences in 2 Cor 12: 1-4.
- 2 Cor 12: 7: In order that these experiences might not make his proud, he was also given a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble. This thorn may have been a temptation, an illness, a physical disability, etc. It may also have been a person ("a thorn in my side") who was a critic and a detractor and constant headache.
- **V. 8:** Three times or repeatedly, Paul begged the Lord in prayer to take this thorn away so bad was it.
- **V. 9:** God answered his prayer but not in the way he asked. He wanted Paul to learn that God can use human weakness to display divine power in us. Our weakness shows that the power comes not from us but from God. Paul learned to accept his weakness so that the power of God could be made manifest.

- V. 10: Paul will accept all difficulties associated with being a missionary apostle for the sake of Christ. When he is weak, he is strong. This duality—these opposites held in tension—corresponds to the mystery of Christ. Christ became poor so that we could become rich. When we die, we are born into eternal life. Life is loss but death is gain. We grow weaker on the outside but stronger on the inside.