

7 July 2024, 7 Pentecost Proper 9B (Track 2)
Trinity Parish of Newton Centre

Ezekiel 2:1-5
Psalm 123
2 Corinthians 12:2-10
Mark 6:1-13

Back to Basics: God Is With Us

The Rev'd Michael Thompson, Esq.

Let us pray.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts beating as one be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer, and set our hearts on fire with love for you, ourselves, and each other. **Amen.**

Why are you here this morning? There are plenty of other things each of us could be doing, so why choose to come to church? Obviously, in accepting the call to be a priest, I have agreed to be at Church, whether I am presiding or not, pretty much every Sunday. Why would someone do that?

Community might be part of the answer; I know it is for me. But there are tons of less Jesus-y places to find community. So, what is it about all of this – Scripture, tradition, liturgy, the pretty objects – that brings us here?

Perhaps it's the stories recorded in Scripture. There is some real drama and exciting stuff in there. God speaks everything into existence, and BOOM!

There it is. Just because God said so. People hear God's voice boom from the heavens and proclaimed powerfully through angels and prophets. God does great feats of power: God leads God's chosen ones to freedom, parts seas, makes food appear, and heals. God makes the impossible happen because there is nothing impossible for God. That's a neat set of stories.

Perhaps the beauty of our liturgy draws you here. That's certainly one of the things that drew me to the Episcopal Church. We Anglicans are very into liturgy. We do it well, and we have every right to be proud of that. Our liturgy honors ancient tradition while speaking to our time and place. Our rituals speak to who we believe God to be. We proclaim God's presence among us; we sing God's praises; we declare faith in God's love and mercy; we recognize and honor God's presence in one another; and we thank God for saving and sustaining us.

These are certainly good reasons to bother coming to church on a Sunday morning. But Scripture and/or beautiful liturgy are not themselves enough. You can read the Bible and any other sacred texts you want on your own at home. You can find beauty in a number of different places. One lesson I hear in our readings today is not to miss the forest for the trees. We have to make sure the booming voices and miracles don't overshadow the still, small voice.

We have to make sure the beauty of our liturgy is not divorced from its meaning. We have to guard against getting too wrapped up in doing “the things” that we lose sight of what they are all about.

We could use a sort of back-to-basics check-in. What is it that we proclaim in reading Scripture, our prayer, our praise, our ritual. It’s a simple truth that is impossible to comprehend fully. God is right here, right now, with us, in us, and among us, pouring love into our very being. All of this is about proclaiming the nearness of our Creator and the unfailingness of our Creator’s love. Simply stated, but if you take a minute to take that in, isn’t it amazing?! In that truth – that no matter what, the One who spoke us into existence loves us and is right near us – is fun, laughter, and unbridled joy. God is here with us, has never left us, and never will.

It seems at first blush that God is setting Ezekiel up for failure. He has been called to be a prophet. God has sent prophets in the past, and those prophets have been consistently ignored. God even tells Ezekiel straight out: “It’s going to be tough to get these folks to listen to you. They don’t really want to hear it.” Why does God keep sending these prophets if God knows most folks won’t listen? Why does God bother sending Ezekiel? Surely, there is something more effective Ezekiel can be doing.

“I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.” Whether we listen or not, God wants us never to forget that God is here. God is invested in us and what we do and how we live. God wants the best for us. Just like any loving parent, God is still going to show God’s children the path to life and joy – even if we don’t listen. God is still going to make sure we know that God is here and God loves us – even when we are hard-headed and do things that hurt ourselves.

Knowing this, knowing that God is with us and in us and for us, sustains Paul even as he struggles. Whatever this “thorn” is, whatever this “weakness” is, the core truth shines through. God declares in it, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” God knows that we hurt. God knows that we are challenged and that sometimes we feel like we can’t go on. But God is with us and loves us so much that God will be our strength. God says, “You don’t have to go it alone. You have me, the Creator and Ruler of the Universe.”

Then we get to Jesus. The people of his hometown recognize that he is special. He has wisdom. He has done deeds of power. But they’ve known him since he was a kid: “That’s Josh from down the street.” You’d think they would be proud

of their favored son being so amazing, but instead they are offended. “Get out of here with that nonsense.” They reject him.

And it’s not just him. As Jesus sends out the twelve, as he challenges them to rely on the goodness and kindness of others, he doesn’t hide from them that some will reject them. Some people will not welcome them. But, like Ezekiel, they have important work to do. They have to proclaim that core truth. God is here. God is with us. God is in us. God loves us. God wants us to join God’s circle of divine love.

Even in the face of rejection, the twelve carry on. And ultimately, they find joy. In testifying to the truth of God’s presence with and in us and God’s unfailing love for us, the amazing happens. People are healed body, mind, and soul. The Truth sparks joy and healing.

Remember what everything we do today and every Sunday, what everything in our Sacred Texts, is all about. As beautiful as it all is, it’s not about the pretty clothes or the shiny golden crosses and vessels. It’s about what they proclaim: that God has been with us from the beginning, remains with us through the highest highs and the lowest lows, and will always be there. And we, too, are called to proclaim that Truth – for when we do, there is healing, there is wholeness, there is joy. Amen.