

The Spirit Entered Me

Proper 9

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Ezekiel 2:1-5

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

We've been hearing about the Holy Spirit several times this year. But with all the topics we've covered, we have not talked about whether or not He appeared in the Old Testament. Neither have we heard how He comes to us in Holy Baptism.

In the Gospel of John we hear that: “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5).” From this, we know that the sacrament of Holy Baptism is not a water-only washing but a water and Spirit washing. The Holy Spirit is thus received in Baptism and works in Baptism as He does through each means of grace.

This is not to say that we have a Baptism of the Spirit separate from Holy Baptism itself. It is one and the same thing. In Holy Baptism, both the water and the Spirit are present.

So now what about the Spirit in the Old Testament—before John the Baptist announcing Jesus would come and baptize with the Holy Spirit? Did the people of Israel have the Holy Spirit before them, or were they waiting for Him to come through Baptism like they were waiting for Jesus to be revealed as the Coming Messiah? Several texts in the Old Testament give us the answer, including our reading from Ezekiel today.

Verse 1

“(H)e said to me, ‘Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.’ And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.”

Like Isaiah in the throne room of God, when confronted with the God of the universe, Ezekiel falls down before Him. That's what we read just a few verses before our text: “Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of the one speaking.” Then, in our text, God speaks to Ezekiel, and God's Spirit enters him and causes him to stand before God. This is significant to note because just like today, it is by the power of the Spirit of God that anyone can do anything good before God. Here, Ezekiel is being called to be the prophet of God—again, something which can only be done out of the faith which is grown by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word. God spoke, and the Spirit caused Ezekiel to rise and, ultimately, to go out and be God's messenger to His people.

Today the work of the Holy Spirit continues to be standing us on God's Word. He causes us to stand on the truth of the Scriptures and to not be moved from them. Satan, the world, others, and fear all try to get us to move off of the Word. But God calls each of us to stand on His Word, as He told Ezekiel to stand before Him.

God was not calling Ezekiel to do something he could not do—God fully recognized that Ezekiel was a “Son of man.” He was a fallen creation, like every other human being that has ever lived on the earth, save Christ Jesus. But like every other fallen human being, God gave Ezekiel the power he would need to do God's Will. He gave Ezekiel His Spirit. As we heard a few weeks ago, we cannot by our own reason or strength come to God or do His Will, but the Holy Spirit works in us to believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior and so that we might be able do those good works God has laid out before us to walk in. More than that, God gave Ezekiel His Word, as we hear in our next verses.

Verse 2

“And he said to me, ‘Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants also are impudent and stubborn...’”

Also like Isaiah, Ezekiel was sent to a people who would not necessarily hear him—even though he was coming with the Word of God Himself. In Isaiah, we all remember the scene where God calls Isaiah and the “Here am I! Send me” response; but right after that Isaiah gets bad news. God said, “Go, and say to this people, ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” In other words, the people would not listen to God’s Word and it would make Isaiah’s mission extremely difficult. To this, “(Isaiah) said, ‘How long, O Lord?’”

Today we are sent to speak to people who are also “rebels...(with) descendants (who) are impudent and stubborn.” There may be times at which we ask “How long, O Lord?” When we continue to hear acceptance in the news and television for so many things God tells us are sinful. When members of our own families do not follow God’s ways. When friends look at us as bigots and intolerant. This may drive us to ask “How long, O Lord?”

To be fair, we are all sinners as well. Have there ever been times in your life where you spoke up for someone caught in sin? Or have there ever been times when you were against someone just because of skin color, gender, or socioeconomic status—that is, whether they were rich or they were poor? None of us is above or beyond doing such a thing—and these are things about which we might rightly be called bigots or intolerant.

Yet was it Ezekiel’s own opinion God was sending him to take? If it was, then Ezekiel had every right to expect others not to listen. His opinion, like yours and mine today, was just one out of however many thousands, millions, or billions were on the planet at that time. Human opinions really don’t matter. But again, was that what God had given Ezekiel to speak? Listen to what God tells him at the end of our text.

Verse 3

“...I send you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

Ezekiel, then, was sent not to speak his own words or opinions, but God’s. While he might have expected to have his own opinions ignored, he might have hoped that the people would hear God’s Word. Sadly, this is not what God told him to expect.

Today we are also called to speak God’s Word. And if you have ever tried to speak to more than one person about it, you have probably found that while some may listen, others will not. We speak to others God’s Word, and we let them know that it is God’s Word we are speaking, and not just our own ideas. “And whether they hear or refuse to hear...they will know.” After all, *we* are not called to convince anyone.

The Holy Spirit is the one who will work faith in any who are to come to believe. It was Him who brought us to faith, and it will be Him who brings any others to faith. I cannot by my own reason or strength, no. That’s the work of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we may be sent to speak God’s Word to stubborn people who will not listen. But no one knows the future. One who is stubborn today may turn around. Tomorrow, our country may stop being intolerant of

Christianity. Either way, we—you and I—are called to speak God's Word: me as your pastor, and you as members of the priesthood of all believers.

We get to go out and speak God's Word, which is always a blessing, no matter who listens or who doesn't. After all, we get to tell others how they and we are sinners. How we have not kept God's Law. But we also get to tell them that God sent a way out of destruction for being sinners: by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah for whom Ezekiel and the others in the Old Testament with the Holy Spirit eagerly longed. Today we continue to look to Jesus—not to come and save us from destruction, but to bring us home with Him. In Jesus' Name. Amen.