

“Stop Me if You’ve Heard This One Before”

Ezekiel 2:1-5

Paul says in our Epistle reading, “I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities” for the sake of the Gospel. We heard Jesus tell His disciples to be prepared for entire towns rejecting their testimony of the Gospel. If need be, shake the dust off of your feet as a testimony against them. Annalisa and Hunter were out in Missoula, MT this week honeymooning and interviewing for jobs. So I looked on city-data.com and saw that 71% of the people of Missoula have no church affiliation. That is a pretty common number for towns in the Pacific Northwest. For comparison, 22% of Adams County has no religious affiliation.

There is an LCMS church in Missoula a little bigger than Our Redeemer. And I was thinking about the demographic differences between our two cities and how being a pastor there would be different than being here.

But then I thought some more about the readings for today and remembered something that should have been obvious from the start. The pastor in Missoula has the same obligation that I have: preach the Word of God “in season and out of season” – that is, speak the truth of God’s Word even when the culture around us doesn’t want to hear it. Because you can be assured that the culture around us does not want to hear the Law and the Gospel. Never in the history of man since the Fall has anyone’s sinful nature wanted to hear the Law and the Gospel.

So how do we best go about sharing this message that people deep down don’t really want to hear because it causes our rebellious nature to be

uncomfortable. The reality is that you can't force anyone to believe, but you can present the Word of God in such a way that they will know that the Word of God was spoken among them. Whether they hear it or refuse to hear, that is on them. But what is clear is that the Word of God is to be presented in such a way so that there is no question that the Law and the Gospel have nothing in common with the popular culture around us.

Ezekiel and Paul and the disciples were not sent out with the hope of crafting a message which would be palatable to the rebellious world. Crafting a message today which will be palatable to the popular culture puts the message of Law and Gospel at great risk. By definition, creations of the pop culture are meant to cause a temporary, emotional euphoria that soon thereafter wanes away. Our attitude toward the Word of God cannot be "Been there, done that, what's next? Give me something that's new and improved."

That which is clever or funny is only clever or funny the first time you hear it. There is a reason that when people tell jokes, they will say, "Stop me if you've heard this one before." No one wants to hear a joke a second time, let alone a third time. Jokes get old.

I don't know what the number one song is this week on any of the music charts. However, no matter what style of music is to your liking, I challenge anyone to tell me from memory what the number one song from any genre of music was during this week two years ago. No one here knows unless you Google it, and most likely no one cares. The number one songs from years past have now become passe; they are old news. We even get tired of hearing some of the songs that were at one time our favorites. The likes of Menudo and Vanilla Ice go from being superstars to being little more than the butt jokes.

Why do popular songs lose their popularity? Why do "great" movies only stay in the theater a short time? Why do jokes or comedy routines that at one time made us laugh so hard we cried, no longer make us laugh? These things happen

because, by definition, creations of the pop culture are meant to cause a temporary, emotional euphoria that soon thereafter wanes away.

Therefore, by definition, the worship life of God's people should not be built upon the temporary foundation of the popular culture. This is why we worship in the way that we do. We offer something that is meant to last throughout our lifetime.

I can't tell you how many times an Alzheimer patient or someone on their deathbed has been able to participate or respond to portions of the liturgy that I use in my devotions with them – even though they were not responsive to anyone else. It is a part of them which they hold and cherish. God and His Word are “the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

This is why taking on the trappings and style of the society in which we live cannot be a good long-term approach to the proclamation of the Gospel. We live in a throw-away society where many people have a drive-thru window mentality about everything, including God and His Church.

Many people approach God like they are at the McDonald's drive thru. They only drive up to it when they want to, and they pick and choose which parts of God's Word and Church that they want to order up for themselves. The family of four tells God: “We want four orders of eternal life...four orders of forgiveness (and on three of those you can hold the repentance)...and an extra-large income to go...Kids, do you want any commandments...No, we don't need any of that. Thank you.”

This family of four will be very disappointed to find that there is no pick-up window for these types of orders. God's Word is not disposable, nor is it something from which we are allowed to pick and choose. God's gifts do not bring a temporary, emotional euphoria. What God has to offer is permanent peace.

By definition, permanent peace is impossible to attain through the means of the popular culture. Therefore we are called to stand in opposition to the world,

just as Ezekiel was called to stand in opposition to the people of Israel. When the Lord called Ezekiel to be His prophet, God said to him: “The people to whom I am sending you are impudent and stubborn.” They are disrespectful to Me and stubborn.

Similar to what we discussed last week, they are the “crowd” – they know nothing and they do not perceive or understand the power of God. Ezekiel was sent to them and called to preach the Lord’s Word. It is only through the Word of God that hearts are changed and the spiritually dead are made alive.

God gave no guarantees to Ezekiel that he would have resounding success in winning over the hearts of the people. In fact, the Lord said to him that whether they hear or refuse to hear – for they are a rebellious people – the one thing that you are responsible for is that they will know that a prophet has been among them.

The Lord doesn’t tell Ezekiel that “if preaching My Word doesn’t work, then I have a few clever sayings and this song with a catchy little tune that I know the people will just love.”

Like Ezekiel, we are called to preach and teach the Word of God in its truth and purity. Not just here on Sunday morning, but in our homes and in every aspect of our lives. The eternal gifts from God are to be heard in our words and seen in our actions.

Our calling is much like Ezekiel’s. We are to speak the Word of God and whether the people around us listen or fail to listen, one thing must be certain, they must know that the Word of God has been spoken among them.

The Holy Spirit works through the spoken Word and through the Word joined with water, bread, and wine. There is nothing in God’s Word that is temporary or fading away. And like Ezekiel, we have been called to be the faithful voice amid a rebellious people. It is not an easy task, but in the midst of insults, hardships, and persecutions, the people of God continue to serve the Lord with gladness. Amen.