

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 07.05.15 (Pentecost 6b)*

Day One: Ezekiel 2:1-5

Son of Man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation... obstinate and stubborn... And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them.

What a job description! God knows that many, even most of the Israelites, might not listen to his prophet. But he sent him anyway.

Advertisers go to great lengths today to make sure they send their message to the most receptive audience. It's a big waste of time and money to try to convince people who refuse to be convinced. So why do you suppose God sent his prophet to people that he knew would probably not listen?

Judging from the rest of Scripture, it looks like God sends his prophets even when he knows people won't listen because he loves them and wants to give them every chance. But in the end it is not up to the prophet to fix the

nation. That will only happen when people listen.

Out of all the hundreds of things that parents try to tell their children, we know that they are not going to accept all of them. And some they will accept for now, but reject when they grow up. But we teach them anyway. Why? Because we love them!

Because we are loved by God, we want to love all the others that he cares for as well. So we go out with a message of God's love, and his loving Law, to our nation which might not want to hear it. But we do it because we love them, not out of anger or hate.

If God sent you to speak to the people of America, what would his message be? How will your neighbors know that a Christian has been among them?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I have been invisible when I ought to have stood out. I have been silent when I should have been heard. Please give me wisdom to speak and act in such a way that my community may know that a believer in Jesus has been among them. Amen.*

Day Two: 2 Cor 12:1-10

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven... He heard inexpressible things, things that it is not permissible to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses.

Bragging isn't always what it appears to be. Sometimes we brag about our own achievements. But sometimes we brag about our family members, or our friends, as a sneaky way of bragging about ourselves. We call that "name dropping." And even when we talk about our weaknesses, we are sometimes really bragging.

I confess, sometimes when I say that I'm just SO busy, I am not only looking for sympathy but I'm also hoping you think that I must be very important and diligent and hard working.

Paul does none of those things. He says that he boasts about his weaknesses, but not in order to get sympathy. He boasts about how God has overcome his weakness, or done great things in spite of his weakness. It's like if you talk about your cancer in order to tell us about your

wonderful doctor. Or if you talk about your foolishness in order to show us the patience and love of your spouse.

Take a quick inventory of your own life to see what God has done, not by giving you amazing successes, but by overcoming your failures.

What are your worst weaknesses? How has God used your weakness to show his strength?

Now think about others whom you know that also have weaknesses. If you tell them about your great success, about what you're really good at, they will feel even smaller than they are. But if you tell them about your weakness, and how God has been so good, you will give them hope.

Which weakness will you share with others?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I wish I could boast about my looks, my wealth, my achievements. But if the truth be known I am weak and sinful. Teach me, then, to boast in my weakness – that all may see your strength, your patience, your forgiveness, and your mercy. Amen.*

Day Three: Mark 6:1-13

Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.

It's nice to remember your old friends from grade school and high school. But what if one of those old classmates were now your supervisor? And what if that person was then promoted... and promoted again... and became president or even owner of the company where you work? For many people that would make their own lowly position unbearable.

When a new person is hired to be our boss, a stranger, we're usually OK with that. But when someone who is "just like us" get promoted above us, that's harder to take.

Why were these people offended by Jesus? He didn't claim to be the boss. He claimed to be the Son of God and the Savior. That's a pretty big claim, but if we were really looking forward to the coming of the Savior, we might be happy to believe it, unless... it turned out to be someone we knew.

If Jesus came from heaven with a loud and frightening display of power, many people would be willing to believe that he is the King, and even worship him. But that's not the kind of king Jesus came to be. Instead, he comes to us through our neighbors, our friends, even our children. We hear God's word from ordinary people, and so we resist it.

"Who are you to tell me what is right and wrong?"
"Who are you to tell us the way to eternal life?"

The reaction of our neighbors is just the same as the reaction of Jesus' neighbors. But that didn't stop Jesus. He loved them anyway. He gave himself for them anyway. And he sent us to them anyway.

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, you know that I love you. I would never be offended by your words. And yet, I have sometimes taken offense when you spoke to me through my pastor, through my friend, or through my co-worker. Lord, give me ears that hear the truth, and eyes to see you in your messengers, and lips to speak your word to others. Amen.*

Day Four:

The Gospel is rather like a pelting rain that hurries on from place to place. What it hits it hits; what it misses it misses. But it does not return nor stay in one place; the sun and heat come after it and lick it up. Experience also teaches us that in no section of the world has the Gospel remained pure and unadulterated beyond the memory of a man. On the contrary, it stood its ground and flourished as long as those remained who had brought it to the fore. But after they passed from the scene, the light also disappeared. Factional spirits and false teachers immediately followed.

Martin Luther

It's a scandal!!!

The papers ran a story about a man in Detroit who, through an error at the bank, was suddenly able to withdraw unlimited amounts of money from his checking account. Although he never had a balance much larger than \$100, he was able to make withdrawals of \$50,000 and more! And then... he lost all of it through gambling.

Of course it's a great scandal for someone to spend money that is not theirs. But there is an even worse scandal

– one so large that I'll bet you won't believe it.

What if a poor person were given unlimited funds – not through a bank error, but through a great sacrifice from a stranger – and then what if that poor person went on living like he was poor? What if he refused to take out more than his usual \$100/month?

“That's ridiculous!” you'd say. “Take the money from him and give it to me!”

And that is what God does. If we don't appreciate the treasure of the gospel, it goes somewhere else. Others, in other countries, will rejoice to receive it. Will we, in this place, share the Good News, or lose it?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I am rich!
And yet I feel poor. I am forgiven!
And yet I feel guilty. I have life
eternal! Lord, help me live as if I
owned the treasures you have for me.
Amen.*

These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at stpaulannarbor.org