

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 14<sup>TH</sup>. SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
Ezekiel 2: 2-5 Psalm 123 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10 Mark 6: 1-6

Dear Preachers:

PRENOTES: There are some good sources for preaching justice at the end of this edition. You will also find there rich material for reflection in a preaching student’s “Mission Statement.” And for a chuckle, don’t miss the “No Excuse Sunday” parish bulletin announcement.

And now to the preaching. Let's focus on preaching from the Hebrew texts and on this week's Ezekiel reading. But before we get to Ezekiel, we'll reflect for a moment on our attitudes toward the Hebrew text.

Let's face it, we seldom hear a preaching from the Hebrew Scriptures, and we preachers might also admit we seldom preach from them! But, it may be time to let the ancient themes inspire us, especially if we feel in a rut. Why have we avoided these texts? We probably feel less secure in this vast territory; it's so varied in its type of literary genres and seems to require so much more background. Some of us may feel, like Marcion, that the God of the Hebrews is a very different God from that of Jesus. (We do hear those references that contrast the "God of the Old Testament" from the "God of the New." It's as if God went through a major personality shift from one testament to the other!) Marcion wanted to drop the Hebrew bible from the Christian canon and even cut out some of the Hebrew references in the Christian writings. Well, he was soundly condemned and the church declared that the Hebrew bible was to be read in the Christian assembly.

But Gail Ramshaw asks an important question concerning interpretation of the Hebrew texts: with what intention do Christians read the Hebrew Bible? Do we read it for its historical value? Do we use it to learn the significance of the Passover for our deeper understanding of our ritual?

Do we read it as a "Great Book" and get enlightened by the "truths" it conveys?

She suggests that we read it in its own right. She also says we read it from a "typological" perspective; not in a former typological way, that saw everything in the Hebrew texts as a "type" for Christ, i.e. that the Hebrew narratives be understood as divine promises fulfilled later in Christ. One fault with this way of

reading of the ancient texts, she says, is that this method often disregards "with blatant Christian imperialism," God's faithfulness to the covenant made with the Jews.

Ramshaw suggests typology be seen as a form of extended metaphor. Our hopes and dreams, our disappointments and fears are told in story. The great stories symbolize our search for wisdom, for meaning. They express our longing for God. The Hebrew bible then, presents us with many stories of God's grace, and in the early church these tales were vehicles that communicated the message of God's grace-filled initiative into our lives. For example, the Hebrew metaphors of the crossing of the Red Sea, or Jonah in the whale, were used to understand our own basic metaphor, the resurrection. We tell the ancient stories and borrow their imagery that describes our need and God's grace to help understand our own experience of need and the desire for God.

One of the contributions of the Hebrew scriptures is a strong concern for the ethical and moral life of the community. Some Christians have unfairly considered these writings as morally inferior to the New Testament. But study of the ancient tradition shows a deep commitment to ethical issues of justice and righteousness. Our first reading today, from Ezekiel reminds us of the contributions of the prophets to the ethical behavior, not just of the individual, but of the entire community. So, after these introductory words of encouragement, let us turn to our reading from Ezekiel and see what treasures may lie there for the preacher and our listeners.

First of all, a strategy to follow in preparing a preaching from any of these texts: we need to pay close attention to the place the passage has in the larger context of the whole book and its message. In other words, we need to keep the integrity of the context. Even though the first reading in the Sunday Lectionary has been selected to point to the Gospel reading, in order to get a full hearing of the Hebrew scriptures, we need to give them a hearing on their own. Don't be too quick to see how they line up with the Gospel. Let them speak for themselves. To do this, we will have to do a little study about the text and the book from which it comes. Realizing our busy schedules and the press to get the preaching prepared, we can do this study expeditiously. Check out what a commentary says in its introduction to Ezekiel.

Thus, you will discover that prophet wrote from Babylonian captivity. He was

probably exiled in the first deportation around 597 B.C.E. Our selection is from the beginning of the book and narrates the prophet's call (read Chapter 1-3 for the fuller narration). He is the first prophet to receive his call outside Israel. His message will be like that of other prophets; he is passionate and uncompromising as he speaks on God's behalf. He calls people to individual responsibility, repentance and submission to God's will. In the first part of the book, he predicts the fall of Jerusalem as he reproaches Israel for its past and present sins. But after Jerusalem's fall his message changes as he speaks of the exiles becoming the hope for the new Israel. (His famous "dry bones" account, in chapter 37, is the classic location for this promise). A strong theme emerging from this prophet is that the new heart and spirit that will be needed for the new covenant, cannot be the work of humans, but must be the work of God. This message prepares the way for the Gospel of salvation through grace, the central message of the new Testament.

The prophet receives his call in exile. God wants the people to know, "that a prophet has been among them." To have a prophet in our midst is a favor, a sign of God's concern for us, a reminder that God will not leave us on our own for long but will come looking for us. God is passionately concerned about God's people and does not want them (us) to follow ways that lead to destruction. For those who are "far off" because of life's circumstances or because of unfortunate choices we have made, the reading is encouraging. We are not abandoned after all. We may be in our circumstances because of what we have done, but God will come to us, send word to us and lead us back.

The preacher might want to ask some reflective questions for the congregation to ponder and to help them hear the contemporary application of the reading. For example: When in my life did I feel I had wandered off, felt exiled? Who were the voices, the people who helped me come to my senses? Who gave me directions? Words of encouragement? Words of warning? In my life today, who speaks loving and direct words to me to help me see my faults? Who are the truth tellers? Do I see God's loving concern in all these people, or are they just nuisances in my life? In the wider parish community--who are the prophetic voices? Who speak of God's holiness and sovereignty, by the holiness of their own lives? Who show God's concern for the poor, and help the community grow in its consciousness of the needs of others? Who in the larger society call us as a people to integrity and compassion? Who speak on behalf of the environment and the sacredness of all creation? What about parents? Aren't they the first prophets in their children's lives, speaking words of love and wisdom? Aren't they also "without honor in

their native land"?

It is clear that we are never outside the range of God's love. No matter where our exile, God is there speaking to us through the prophets. The preacher, through this reading, can help change the common notion that a prophet is a fortune teller and help listeners appreciate the presence of God in our lives through these speakers of God's Word.

## QUOTABLE

A preaching student once wrote this for herself;  
she gave me permission to share it.

### Ministry Statement

As a preacher,  
I choose to respond affirmatively to God's call  
to proclaim the Good News  
with my entire being.

I trust that the people of God  
will assist me in this process.

I would like to be a preacher  
that is in touch with self, God and others  
that listens attentively, even to the silence  
that speaks words of comfort when needed  
that gives voice to the needs of the voiceless  
that studies, prays, and lives God's Word  
that simply tries to walk the talk  
Or as Micah says its,  
that acts justly, loves tenderly and walks humbly with God  
that dies gratefully and confidently  
having known and shared the love of God.

To be this kind of preacher I will need to  
Prepare  
Practice  
Persevere

Put heads together  
Pray  
Place trust in self, God and others  
Preach  
Play  
Peer creatively into the book of life  
Paint with living words on the canvas of life.

-- Jan Dworschak (Jan does ministry and preaching in the San Francisco area.)

### JUSTICE PREACHING

From a recent news release:

Pope John Paul II has strengthened the Roman Catholic Church's condemnation of the death penalty by removing from the words in Section 2266 of the Catholic Catechism the statement that the death penalty could be imposed in cases of extreme gravity. The pope calls executions cruel and unnecessary.

On July 9, Pope John Paul II, speaking from the Coliseum where thousands of Christians were murdered for their faith, will call for a worldwide moratorium on the death penalty and an end to torture and inhumane conditions for prisoners all over the world.

The Holy Father has designated July 9 as the "Jubilee Day for the Imprisoned," part of the world-wide Jubilee 2000 program.

Plans call for John Paul II to visit either Regina Coeli Prison or Rebibba Prison in Rome. He has called on bishops throughout the world to engage in similar activities in their areas.

#### SOME MORE RESOURCES FOR PREACHING JUSTICE:

Major Catholic Statements on Social Justice Issues

The following documents from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops/U.S. Catholic Conference explore issues of social justice. To obtain copies or more information call: 1-800-235-8722.

#### **Pursuing Social Justice**

A Commitment to All Generations: Social Security and the Common Good, 1999

Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, 1995

One Family Under God, 1995

Confronting a Culture of Violence, 1995

Moral Principles and Policy Priorities for Welfare Reform, 1995

The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace, 1993

A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform, 1993

Renewing the Earth, 1992  
Putting Children and Families First, 1992  
New Slavery, New Freedom: A Pastoral Message on Substance Abuse, 1990  
Brothers and Sisters to Us, 1989  
Relieving Third World Debt, 1989  
Food Policy in a Hungry World, 1989  
Called to Compassion and Responsibility: A Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis, 1989  
Homelessness and Housing, 1988  
Economic Justice for All, 1986;

#### JUST FOR FUN----- “NO EXCUSE SUNDAY”

A pastor friend inserted the following in his parish bulletin:

“To make it possible for everyone to attend Church next Sunday, we are going to have a special ‘No Excuse Sunday.’ Cots will be placed in the vestibule for those who say, ‘Sunday. is my only day to sleep in.’ We will have steel helmets for those who say, ‘The roof would cave in if I ever came to church,’ Blankets will be furnished for those who think the church Is too cold, and fans for those who say it is too hot. We will have hearing aids for those who say, ‘The priest speaks too softly’ and cotton balls for those who say, ‘He preaches too loudly.’ Some relatives will be in attendance for those who like to go visiting on Sundays. One section will be devoted to trees and grass for those who like to see God in nature. Finally, the sanctuary will be decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies for those who have never seen the Church without them.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

"First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, [Click Here](#).

If you would like to support this ministry, [Click Here](#) to make a secure tax-deductible online donation.

Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

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