

Sermon Transcript

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We are not the first generation to be holding onto our faith during historic upheavals such as what the Supreme Court is handing us in our time. Today's readings reveal life changing moments in the lives of Ezekiel, Paul and Jesus. I ask you to consider their stories with meditative hearts. Their stories reach out to us in our own cliff hanger present moment.

Ezekiel's life changing event was a vision. The Spirit with many wings and many eyes told Ezekiel, "Mortal! I am sending you to a nation of rebels who are impudent and stubborn." From Ezekiel we learn that being in the midst of a stubborn rebellious people is exactly where we seek God. The people Ezekiel was sent to were in exile in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, its despotic emperor. In our time, we look for the prophets who speak a word of truth to us. But we also hear that impudence and stubbornness are endemic to human nature. We stand up against the transgressors of God's word.

Paul's life-changing event began with a mystical vision, likely similar to Ezekiel's. Scholars agree Paul himself had the vision. He describes being carried up to the third heaven, where mysteries were revealed to him. The vision was so powerful Paul couldn't tell if he was in his body or in a dream state. As it turned out, the life changing event was not the vision. Paul realized that he was unable to convey its power believably. He was forced to recognize that his human self, puny though it was compared to the vision, was what he had to offer. The Lord told Paul "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." Hardships, persecutions, calamities were where God was for Paul. "Whenever I am weak, then I am strong" says Paul. Paul lived and founded churches under Nero, a ruthless ruler of an empire. The message for us is that weakness conveys a clearer word from God than any bragging about strength or any vision of empire. Weakness does not equate to helplessness. What Paul did was found churches. Closer to our time, non-violent resistance is an example of effective weakness in action. Paul would applaud our fellowship with Beyond Borders' and their selection of the most needy families to coach and assist.

The life changing event for Jesus was his last visit to his hometown and family. The village came to hear him teach. We hear them talking among themselves: Astounding! Who is he? Don't you know he is our old carpenter, Mary's son. He comes from that big family with no father. They avoided Jesus so completely that only a very few were healed by his touch.

The skepticism of his hometown changed Jesus' approach to ministry. Instead of doing all the healing himself, after this he built out his ministering community. Jesus called the twelve and sent them out two by two. Like Ezekiel and like Paul, the twelve could count on nothing but complete trust in their teacher and in God. With that they were able to cover a large territory. They began building the kingdom in a land ruled by the autocratic King Herod Antipas, the Roman Tetrarch of Galilee.

From Jesus we learn that counting on our community is what we are called to do. But not just for ourselves, to keep ourselves safe. We learn that we must venture out into the wider community without any armor to protect us. Jesus would encourage our new partnership with Face to Face, extending our community into Germantown.

In all three of these lessons we learn that God is in the life changing events. We hear that God can be found in the midst of change and turmoil perhaps more clearly than in routine daily living. Let us face these times by following the examples of Ezekiel, Paul and Jesus. Let us commit firmly to our wider community and extend it out to serve those who will suffer most in the difficult times that we fear are coming, no matter who becomes our next president.