

Proper 9, Year B
July 7, 2024

O mortal, stand up on your feet and I will speak with you. And when He spoke to me, a Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet.

Weakness and power.

The implication in Ezekiel is not only that I cannot stand up without God's help, but that God will not speak to me unless I stand. That immediately sets me wondering about prayer posture: do we stand up straight and look God in the face, or do we kneel on the floor, head bowed, eyes closed? Maybe we – like Ezekiel - wait for the Spirit to enter us and tell us.

*Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand;
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.*

"Whenever I am weak, then I am strong," second Corinthians reminds us. When we are in our most vulnerable place – asking for help - that's when the Spirit empowers us.

Precious Lord, take my hand...

I don't want that responsibility today. I can't be an adult just now. I look in the mirror and don't see the twenty something I remember as myself, but a greying distortion of that - wrinkles and all - and yet, find some relief in knowing that I've earned those wrinkles and that grey: I survived two graduate schools; birthed two sons; moved around from Connecticut to Kentucky to Long Island, worked my way up to Maine, landed in Vermont, totally changed vocation in my 70s.

And I just want to hide under a nice cold rock right now.

I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.

The eyes of the servants look to the hand of their masters and the eyes of a maid to her mistress' hand, the psalmist tells us. Why? For help. It's somewhat uncomfortable to be in a place where you have to go to your boss and say, "hey, I need help on this one," especially if your boss is generally pretty unapproachable. It takes courage, it takes humility, it takes admitting you're vulnerable.

Jesus went to his hometown. He went back to where he came from, to his roots. One wonders why. Perhaps to see his father's family. We don't hear about Jesus' earthly father at all in the Gospel of Mark; the last time we hear about him is in Luke's Gospel – not mentioned by name – in the account of 12-year-old Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem. Maybe Jesus wanted to walk past the house where he

grew up, spending hours with Joseph, learning about carpentry. I've so often wanted to return to Waterbury, CT and drive past the house I grew up in, to see if it's still there, to see if the three levels of flower, fruit and vegetable gardens my parents so religiously tended are still flourishing or if they've just gone to grass and weeds. I'm not convinced Jesus anticipated the less than appreciative reception he got: he was amazed at their unbelief, Mark says. You can't be doing this, boy; we've known you all your life, you're a carpenter, these are your brothers and sisters. You're Mary's oldest kid. We've all had that experience of visiting home after having been gone for a while, whether off to school or working at a career that took us elsewhere, and being treated by family and friends on our return as though no time had elapsed, no change, no maturing: you are who you were and you were who you will always be. Interesting to note that it is at the beginning of this - Mark's - Gospel when Jesus refutes that attitude: his response to "you will always be what you have always been" is "I'm going to make you better than you've ever been; I'm going to show you the way to being the one God calls you to be; I'm going to make you fishers of people!"

Jesus is teaching his disciples about what may happen: folks may receive you with open arms, listen to what you have to say, witness the power of God in the midst of their despair. And believe. Or they may mock you; they may remind you of your childhood, call you weak. But my grace is sufficient for you, says God in second Corinthians, for power is made perfect in weakness. Jesus' message, a love-filled response to the prophets who came before, almost an apology for not making perfectly clear the job description – to Isaiah, to Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Micah, Hosea, Joel, Daniel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, all the prophets – that power is made perfect in weakness, that the distrust and mockery and scorn with which you are greeted, the murder you may face, gives you power to boast about the God that is Truth. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to you, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me! A prophet speaks the Truth which is God and yet will not be honored in its hometown, amongst family members, or even within the walls of its birth.

Just as the disciples, we are not all called to be prophets. But when we live our lives as Christians, we will encounter criticism. We will be mocked for believing in something that cannot be proven, laughed at for being taken in by someone who most likely "does not even exist", accused of not being truly Christian because we are not the right brand of Christianity, ridiculed because we pray to someone who

“never did me any favors.” And there will be days when we feel broken, alone, unloved, at the bottom of the well where we cannot see the light above. Jesus says, that’s the time; that’s when the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with God’s truth and power; that’s the time!

*Through the storm, through the night,
Guide my feet, hold me tight,
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me on.*