

## Ezekiel 2:1-5

I have no intention of traveling to Los Angeles on Tuesday to be a part of Michael Jackson's memorial service. My ears have heard enough already of what a great man he was; that the world is a better place because of him; that despite his weaknesses and his past failures, he was the greatest entertainer of our generation. I'm not here to judge the self-acclaimed "king of pop." God is the almighty, all-knowing Judge. But we do know that He judges not based upon what we do with our talents, and whether or not we have millions of adoring fans, but upon what we do with Jesus and His Word.

I can say to you quite confidently that every word spoken at Tuesday's memorial service will eulogize the man known as Michael Jackson, but not one word will be said of Christ, and faith in His Gospel, and His death upon a cross, and His resurrection on Easter Sunday, and His Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. And events such as this should serve to remind us how far apart the church is from the world. When someone of the world dies, it's all about them; but when someone in the church dies, it's all about Christ. The world eulogizes their own, but we in the church give all praise and honor to Jesus who died for all, in the church and in the world, so that trusting in Him we have eternal life in His name.

Believing that, being baptized into Christ, confessing His name, your place is within His church even though you still live in this world. And one of the distinguishing marks which identifies you as a member of His church is that you hear the Word of God...not to be critical, not to be puffed up so you can say to your neighbor, "I'm better than you because I hear God's Word;" but to humbly hear that Word, confessing your sins and believing the good news of forgiveness in Christ.

Many years ago Ezekiel was called upon to deliver that same Word to the people of God living in the land of Israel. Now these were God's people, called out of this dying world to be His own possession. And so we would suppose that as God's prophet spoke to them, they would open their ears to listen to what God had to say. But listen to these words of our text: "I am sending you to them," God said to Ezekiel, "And whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious people, they will know that a prophet has been among them."

Why would God's people refuse to hear what God spoke to them through His prophet? Was it because the people didn't like Ezekiel? "Send us another prophet and we'll listen!" Is that what they said? No. Was it because they did not have time to listen to God's Word right then? No. Was it because they already knew what Ezekiel was going to say because they had heard it all before when they were in Sunday School and Confirmation Class, and so they did not have to listen? No. Here is why God's people refused to listen to Him: "Because," God says, "They are a stubborn and rebellious people." And that, is it not, is as true today as back in the day of Ezekiel?

The Word of God was given not to the world, but to the church. God did not drop His Scriptures out of the heavens like rain upon the world. He delivered the Word of Christ to His church and said, "Do not cast My pearls before the swine." When God opens the door, we in the church can speak His words to those in the world that He might call them into His church; and we pray for those mission doors to open. But even when they're not open, the Word of God is still being spoken and heard--not by those in the world, but by those in the church. Christians hear the Word of God; those in the world do not. Tuesday's service in Los Angeles will not be about the Word of Christ. But every service and funeral service here in God's church is about Jesus. Those in the world know about the Bible, but for us in the church, the Bible is the witness to Jesus Christ and is our life, hope, and salvation.

I was in Kansas City last week for a few days, and encountered and conversed with people of the world; people living apart from what God says in His Word. Did I rise up and condemn them for their sinful lifestyles? No. I am not called to preach to them, and there was no open mission door. But here I am called. Here at Christ Lutheran Church in Augusta it is expected of God's people to listen. Here those who call themselves Christians are not to act like those in the world, refusing to hear the Word of God, but like those within the church who hear, read, mark, learn, and take that Word to heart.

Whatever excuse I give to refuse to hear the Word of God, the truth is, as in Ezekiel's day, that I'm just stubborn and rebellious. Whatever I say in defense of why I do not read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's Word, the truth is that I am just stubborn and rebellious. When someone in the world refuses to hear the Word of God, that's understandable; they're simply being true to who they are--people of the world. But when I in the church act like those in the world, I have no excuse; I should know better; and I am simply being, like those in Ezekiel's day, stubborn and rebellious.

After Tuesday's service; after all the media attention; after all of Michael Jackson's songs and dance moves, one thing is clear: Michael Jackson has been in our midst. Whether we are better off because of it...that's debatable. But he did leave his mark on the world--that much is certain. We know, without a doubt, that he was among us. And so God says to Ezekiel, "Whether they hear or refuse to hear, they will know that a prophet has been among them." It wasn't about Ezekiel. It wasn't about his opinions and his words. It's about the One he was preaching--God's true Prophet, Christ Jesus. When He walked the earth, it was clear to all, if they chose to accept it, that God was among them. He healed the sick. He drove out demons. He raised the dead. He preached with authority. He forgave sins. Whether the people heard Jesus or refused to hear Him; whether they followed Him or not, one thing was clear: "a prophet has been among them."

Friends, that same Prophet is among us today, for 150 years in this place. Are you baptized into Christ? Do you receive His Sacrament at this altar? Are His words of absolution spoken into your ears? Are our children, and children's children taught of His love for them? Do you have loved ones who died with hope because they trusted in Christ? Do you have that same hope and faith? All of this is because "a prophet has been, and is, among us." It is Christ who calls, gathers, and enlightens His people around His Word and Sacraments. It is Christ who has called you out of this dying world to be His own possession that He may give you every heavenly blessings.

I don't know if He could sing well. I doubt if He had any patented dance moves. When He died, the crowd that had gathered was not there to adore Him, but to mock Him with their jeering. But no one except Jesus left such a mark on this world. His mark was the mark of a nail in His hands and feet. His mark was that of a spear in His side. His mark was that of His words spoken from a wooden cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." His mark was the blood that poured out of His body; which was shed for every person on this sinful earth.

You, friend, can know for certain that the Prophet, Jesus, is here among us, not because His word of law condemns you for your sins, but because His word of forgiveness is for you, and He declares you innocent of every sin. You can know that Jesus is here among you because you can walk up here to His altar today confident that He welcomes you and accepts you because He died for you. You can know that God's Prophet is here among you because you can leave this House in peace believing that your sins are forgiven and eternal life is yours in Christ. You can know that Christ Jesus is here among you because He will not part ways with you at that door; He goes with you this week into the

world to open mission doors for you, to bring His peace into your marriage and family, to show His love through you to your neighbor.

Jesus was not the greatest entertainer of His generation. He was not eulogized before thousands upon His death. But no celebrity, no entertainer, no war hero, no senator, president, friend, or loved one can ever do for you what He has done. You are forgiven of all your sins. You will not die and perish with this dying world. Your place is within His church. Your future is with Him in heaven. His Word...the Word you are hearing right now...declares it so. Amen.