

Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

On this 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend we celebrate the Independence of our colonies from England and the Declaration of Independence. Hopefully everyone has a safe and enjoyable 4<sup>th</sup>. Martin Luther talks about another kind of freedom for Christians. Because of our belief in Christ we are open to God's unconditional love and grace which means we are justified, that we will be held blameless. Because our future is secure, this gives us the freedom God tells Ezekiel to stand up when he talks to him. When God spoke to him a spirit not only entered him but also set him on his feet. God told him he is sending him to speak to the people of Israel, a bunch who has rebelled against God who they and their ancestors have sinned against God and they are impudent and stubborn. Tell them "Thus says the Lord." They may not pay attention, since they are so rebellious, but they will know there is a prophet amongst them. Let me get this straight he must be thinking. You want me to tell a bunch of obstinate, stubborn people who have been defeated by their enemies and are in exile a long distance from their home and are wondering where is God and I am telling them what they don't want to hear, "Thus says the Lord. Don't do me any favors. You see in 589 BC, the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar II laid siege to Jerusalem, culminating in the destruction of the city and its temple in the summer of 587BCE taking the top echelon of Israelites with them to Babylonia, Ezekiel was a prophet in Babylonia, where he was to tell them they should have listened to God. A tough job description.

Now we hear about another disciple Jesus coming to his hometown bringing his disciples with him. You would think he would be the favorite son. He, as a Rabbi, did what he does in other places he visits, on the sabbath he preaches at the synagogue. Many who heard him were astounded. This is a strong word but from his home crowd it is not a positive term like could be used in his others visits to synagogues, but here it becomes a negative term. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! <sup>3</sup>Is not this the

carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses (Hozays) and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Here is why. In an honor/shame society prophets would receive honor but traditional wisdom was in places where they were less familiar. Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh stress about the cultural mores in antiquity of honor and shame. One does not raise above their level. You see “honor was a limited good. If someone gained, someone else lost. To be recognized as a ‘prophet’ in one’s own town meant that honor due to other persons and other families was diminished. Claims to more than one’s appointed (at birth) share of honor thus threatened others and would eventually trigger attempts to cut the claimant down to size.” This was the issue at stake. They knew Jesus was a carpenter. They even refer to him as the son of Mary, where someone is the son of male head of the household, perhaps hinting at illegitimacy. They can not make the leap from carpenter boy to prophet who is trying to steal honor from another family. Jesus is finding how hard it is to be a prophet and says “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” They could not understand his power is from God because he had lived among them for 30 years, He was familiar to them.

Why could Jesus do no deed of power in Nazareth except heal a few people? Faith is the conduit by which Jesus power flows, but not in every instance. For example, those who as healed and saved from demon possession show no faith until being healed. Ironically, the demons know his capabilities. Could it be he does no miracles in Nazareth because people, except for the few healings he did don’t ask him? Not only do they have no faith but also hostility because they drive Jesus from his hometown and try, unsuccessfully, to throw him off a cliff. The reaction of the hometown folks is a precursor to Jesus being rejected in Jerusalem. Ezekiel thought he had it tough as a prophet.

A prophet is identified by the God-powered miracle they perform. If they reject the prophet they reject the message. Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. It wasn’t their level

of belief but rather their belief so Jesus moves on and continues to teach in the villages he comes upon. He brought together the 12 disciples and sent them 2 x 2 with authority over unclean spirits but they were to travel light with no bread no bag or no money. Perhaps this was to show them the power of God. Jesus told them to stay in homes where they were welcome and if people do not want to hear shake off the dust from their sandals. This is mindful of Jesus being rejected but moving on for those that want to hear the message so they continued as they proclaim and tell folks they should repent. To show the power they were given they cast out many demons as they with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Rejection does not keep the power of God, expressed in weakness from spreading the good news. Or as Paul heard, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." May you bask in the grace of God as you proclaim to others this good news and the freedom it brings. Amen.