



Strong in the Broken Places

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 5, 2015

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Author and journalist Ernest Hemingway wrote these words: "Life breaks all of us, but some of us are strong in the broken places." Today Jesus definitely finds himself in the broken place.

We pick up the story of Jesus today in the midst of a homecoming. And although , most of us look forward to homecomings – Jesus arrives in Nazareth and as might be expected – come the time for worship – we find Jesus teaching. It makes sense – he was known in the village. He is remembered by his neighbors. His mother has told everyone he is coming home. And here we are...

6:2 On the sabbath Jesus began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. 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! 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?"

And if the story stopped there – we would all go home content that the Son of God was honored and the world as it should be – ACTUALLY IS! Except! Except! Well, we already know the story does not end how we believe it should.

Instead the neighbors and well-wishers and members of the synagogue and classmates from elementary school and elders of the community become offended! They took offense at him. *6:4 Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." 6:5 And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6:6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.* Not the homecoming we were expecting this morning as Jesus came home to be among his own.



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Life breaks all of us, but some of us are strong in the broken places. I promised I would share some of the amazing moments from being with junior high students at JOLT Adventure Camp. If ever there are broken places in our lives – we often get our first taste of disappointment in those self-confidence building junior high years. What I love the most about JOLT Adventure Camp is that everyone is thrown into the fire at the same time. When we raft – we step into cold river water and then into eight-person rafts and we are off. We barely have time to register the temperature of the water and we are running through rules and safety procedures. And after a leisurely float, we are ready to approach our first major stretch of rapids. You can watch the faces of the students, and some times the adults, as they prepare to wedge their feet under the edges of the raft in order to not be thrown from the raft. Life jackets, helmets, paddles, prayers – and all of a sudden a mouth full of water and you can't remember the last time you were dry. It is fantastic. And after that first rapid – students and adults – are smiles and high-fives. And suddenly in the broken place of fear – we find the strength of community. And then they ask, “When is the next rapid coming?”

I imagine Jesus looking forward to coming home. He has been away for awhile. Traveled, recruited, ministered, healed, taught, and tended without a place to call his own. So going home is about knowing and being known – going home is about the familiar – going home is about love and safety – going home is about finding a moment of peace. Or so Jesus believes. The Bible tells us nothing of his arrival in Nazareth – we pick-up the story in the synagogue. Mark writes that first, the community was astounded, and then they were offended. And we hear Jesus speak these words, “Prophets are not without honor except in their hometown, among their own kin, and in their own house.”

One of the internet writers I follow offered these words, “We are prophets by being who we are.” We are prophets pointing to the future – speaking on behalf of God. Claim the title or not – by your presence in worship this day – you are a prophet. Long before you speak the name of God or tell someone of God's love for them – your



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presence in worship sets you apart from the rest of the world. By your worship of God, you point those around you toward a future of hope – a promise of God’s kingdom come near. It is who you are. We are prophets by being who we are.

I flew to Seattle last Saturday morning – very early – 3:30 a.m. early, which means Starbucks is not open and contacts will not go in. I arrived in Seattle at 10 a.m. and prepared to preach at the service of installation for a friend of mine beginning a new call in a congregation out west. I have known her since I was 7. Thirty-four years of friendship has offered the two of us more than one glimpse of the broken moments of our lives. Through high school, college, seminary, ministries, marriages, childbirth – we have each had occasion to pick up the phone to draw strength from the other. And so at 2 p.m. last Saturday, the congregation gathered to worship God and affirm her call to serve as pastor among them.

I shared with them the reading from Mark 7 –³¹ *Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.* ³² *There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.* Talk about being broken – here was a man in the deep broken place of loneliness - unable to hear the laughter of friends – unable to share in the stories of the day. ³³ *After Jesus took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue.* ³⁴ *He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”).* ³⁵ *At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.*

I love the story. Jesus is right there. The healing is not done from some far off place. Jesus heals the man with his own hands – his own spit. The strength is not the man’s. The strength comes from God. Jesus reminding all of us once again – that in the life Jesus offers there is strength to be found in the broken places. What that means for each of us is that we are “prophets by being who we are.” We are people, who like all



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people find ourselves in the broken places. And in those broken places – God finds us. In the broken places – God gives us strength.

Where is your broken place today? Deny if you must. Lie to yourself if you have to – at least for a little while longer. Or let today be the day – let today be the day that you finally let God into the broken place you have been hiding. My friends, God is already there – giving you strength.

If we are prophets – each of us prophets – pointing to a future that is not our own - than we must be opened to what God has done, is doing, and will do in and through us to God's glory. Today is your opportunity to step into the day of the Lord in new ways: to break the chains of injustice, to get rid of exploitation, free the oppressed, cancel the debts. Are those not dreams to dream? Promises of God worthy of our hope and hunger that we might hold on to them with all our might? "What I am interested in seeing you do," says the Lord, "is this: share your food with the hungry, invite the homeless poor into your homes, put clothes on the shivering, be available to your families." And then God goes one step farther – "here is what I promise to you my children: "I will always show you where to go. I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—firm muscles, strong bones. You'll be like a well-watered garden, a gurgling spring that never runs dry. You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past. You'll be known as those who can fix anything, restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate, make the community livable again."

People of God – I think Jesus must have inspired Hemingway to write the words: "Life breaks all of us, but some of us are strong in the broken places." And yes some of us are strong in the broken places, but the good news is that God is strong in all the broken places. Be at peace. God is with you. I know this to be true. I hear the words of Jesus this day – I speak them to you. "I have told you these things," says Jesus, "so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Amen.