

March 23, 2025 – Ezekiel 33:7-20 & Luke 13:1-9

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone who over-shares? Someone who rambles on and on about a topic that is really only interesting to them. Someone who gives way too much information about topics that are far too personal or embarrassing or even gross. Someone who has enthusiasm that boggles the imagination. Excitement for a subject that is absolutely stifling.

Sitcoms and movies are full of these sorts of people. Because, looking on from the outside, the situations they create are really comical. Donkey from Shrek. Michael Scott. Ross Geller. Sheldon. Kramer. All of them infamous for over-sharing.

In real life, those conversations aren't nearly as funny, though. They're awkward. They're uncomfortable. They're socially painful. Such that we never, ever want to be guilty of that kind of over-sharing. Even though I know I probably have been. Because I just have way too many obscure interests and random bits of trivia floating around in my brain to not be guilty of over-sharing every now and then.

But this fear of over-sharing – this anxiety we have about coming on too strong, pushing a topic too hard, saying too much – influences another aspect of our lives that you may not have realized: our faith. Specifically, the expression of our faith to other people. Because when we talk to someone about our Christian faith, after we get past the initial question of, “What do I say?” Then we need to deal with the question of, “How much should I say?”

In other words, how pushy should you be? How forthright with your faith? How frequent in your testimony? How much of a Jesus freak should you be? Ask a dozen people and you'll get a dozen responses.

Some will tell you that you should be careful and gentle. Avoiding any possibility of offense or judgment. If you know a person doesn't want to hear it, then don't say anything. If you know it will just cause an argument, then keep your mouth shut. Instead, as Jesus said, let them know you are a Christian by your love.

Others take the opposite approach. After all, they say, the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. It will always be offensive to witness to your faith. If you let that stop you, then you'll never say a word to anyone. We are told to go and make disciples. And walking on eggshells doesn't accomplish that. So be upfront about it. Be bold. Be offensive, even.

Which one is right? Well, honestly I see value in both. Peter tells us to speak the truth, but do it in love. Paul tells us to labor for the gospel, but let our gentleness be evident to all. Witnessing to Christ's transforming power through kindness and generosity is great. But you must still speak. You must still declare the Word of God. No matter how uncomfortable that may be. No matter how useless it may seem.

Ezekiel, in our Old Testament lesson, talks about this reality. Ezekiel is a prophet living in Babylon during the captivity. And this is a new situation for the Israelites. Because they're no longer living in their own land under their own laws. Where virtually everyone is a Jew from birth.

They're living in Babylon. Under Babylonian laws. Where they are a minority. And, for the first time in centuries, they have to do something they've never had to do before: evangelize. They have to share their faith. They have to defend their faith. They have to learn what it means to be in the world, but not of it. In many ways, they have to learn the same lesson that Christians would learn again 500 years later. The same lesson that we're still learning today.

And so, surprisingly, what we get in Ezekiel, of all places, is a great outline of a modern day Gospel message to unbelievers. And, as I mentioned, the first element of that message is to speak up. Each of us is a watchman. We stand on the city walls, watching for enemies that might approach. Enemies of sin and temptation and wickedness, that attack our families and friends and neighbors.

And when, in our watchfulness, we see a person begin to fall victim to that sin, we have an obligation to warn them. We don't have an obligation to change them. To force them to listen. If we speak and they ignore us, then that's on their head. We've done our job. But we do have an obligation to speak. And if we don't, then we carry the guilt of their destruction on our heads.

But what do we say? Well, Ezekiel says that we should warn them. Does that mean that we should go around with a sandwich board around our neck, crying out, “Repent! The end is near!” No. A watchman who warns people even when there's no danger near – a watchman who cries wolf all the time – is just as useless as a watchman who doesn't warn when a danger is near. Our words need to be judicious and timely. We speak when the opportunity arises. When the Lord opens our eyes to their need for a warning.

And the warning we give is the same one that Ezekiel gives. Your righteousness before men is no guarantee of salvation. Your good works do nothing to save you. He tells us that a man can be righteous his entire life. He can live an absolutely perfect life. And yet if, at the end of his life, he commits one sin. One act of injustice. One act of wickedness. It's all wasted. None of his righteousness will be remembered by God. An entire lifetime of goodness will be wiped out as if it had never happened.

Kinda makes you realize the fallacy in the old question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Who is good? How do you define good? God defines it as perfection. In God's eyes, there are only two kinds of people in this world: perfect and sinner. So, in general, bad things don't happen to good people. Bad things happen to bad people. And we're all bad.

That's also what Jesus was getting at in our Gospel lesson today. Here he addresses a couple of current events that people were talking about in his day. One was an act of sacrilege that Pilate committed, forcing the Jews to mix human blood – the blood of Galileans – with their Temple sacrifices to the Lord. The other was a tower in the town of Siloam that collapsed and killed 18 people. And, in both circumstances, the people assume that those who suffered because of the tragedies must have been guilty of some great sin.

The Galileans whose blood was used must have been really terrible sinners for God to let their blood be used in such a blasphemous way. The people who were killed by the tower must have been really evil people for God to let a tower fall on them.

But Jesus tells them, no. There was nothing particularly sinful or evil about those people. They were sinners and they died. You are sinners and you are going to die. They needed to repent. You need to repent. Bad things happen to everyone. Because, in God's eyes, we're all bad people who need to repent.

But you know, there was one time that bad things happened to a good person. There was one time when the very worst things happened to the very best person. To the only perfect person to ever walk this sinful earth. When Jesus Christ went to the cross on our behalf, a righteous man remained righteous, and yet died for it.

Died so that we could turn from our wickedness and live. Died so that whether we sinned once in our life or a thousand times or a million times, we could always repent and find salvation. Turn from it and find that God remembered our sin no more. Because every bit of it had been crucified on the cross with Christ.

When the people heard Ezekiel teach this to them, they didn't like it. They told him, “*The way of the Lord is not just.*” And you know what? In their own way, they were right. God's grace is not just. Not in human terms. If it were just, we would all be condemned to hell. If it were just, Jesus would have thrown off the Roman soldiers leading him to his execution, ascended into heaven, and said, “See ya sinners. I'm done with this place. You guys are a mess.”

But no, the beauty of grace is that it's unjust. The beauty of grace is that it's unfair. The beauty of grace is that a righteous man died. And wicked men like us live. So that then we, made righteous, could suffer and die. And those wicked men who persecute and reject us might live. And so on, throughout history. Until that final day when the end is near, and Christ returns to take the watchmen from the walls. Because there will no longer be any enemy to watch for.

That is the message of hope that we preach. Yes, we warn about sin, death, and the devil. Yes, we call people to repentance. Yes, the end is near. But, more than that, we proclaim the good news that we have life through Jesus Christ. That he has freed us from sin, death, and the devil. The enemy of our souls is judged and condemned. So that when the end comes it does not need to be a day of sadness, but a day of joy. Because when God looks at you, he doesn't see the bad person who deserves to die. He sees only his son. And invites us to live. Amen.