

**PENTECOST:
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 9

July 5, 2009

Ezekiel 2:1-5

Psalm 123

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

Mark 6:1-13

A Question of Identity

In this week's readings, prophetic visions and call narratives, and Jesus' experience in his hometown, invite us to think about the nature of our identity as servants of God, which is marked by dependency and paradox.

In Ezekiel 2:1, 2, the prophet is instructed to attend to the word of the LORD. Paradoxically, however, it is a spirit other than the prophet's own that acts upon him and enables him to hear. Later, in verse 5, God says that hearing or refusing to hear will make no difference with respect to the people knowing that a prophet has been among them. Furthermore, the "success" of the prophet's message is not dependent upon the people's reception or their acknowledgment of its divine origin and ordination. Rather, he is called only to speak it obediently (see verses 6 and 7).

The rejection of Jesus in Nazareth stems from the townspeople's familiarity with him and his background. Like the old adage, "Familiarity breeds contempt," it is their supposedly intimate knowledge of him which prevents them from seeing that he is much more than his humble circumstances might otherwise suggest. In Mark, unlike what one finds in the other Gospels, faith *precedes* miracles. Faith is not the product of careful deliberation and conscientious decision. It is, however, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, *NRSV*). Today's passage, coming as it does after a series of stories depicting displays of divine power on the part of Jesus, challenges the notion that Jesus could, somehow, *prove* himself by miracles and acts of power.

Turning now to Paul's ambiguity concerning "a person in Christ ... caught up to the third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2, *NRSV*) implicitly asks the reader to accept by faith the legitimacy of Paul's message. Meanwhile, Paul's testimony concerning the thorn in his flesh reflects a willingness on his part to trust God as the foundation of his identity rather than rely on other measures.

In each of these instances, the authentication and vindication of the individual's identity comes from God. Each one of us is oriented vertically. We are not, as we are so often

taught to think, the result of what reflects upon us from others. In light of this, we might summarize the community prayer of Psalm 123 thus: Who we are is in the hands of God.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Scott S. Elliott, Ph.D, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Translations Officer in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in the various Area Service Centers: **Asia-Pacific** – With thanks for the opportunity to serve God, and with prayers for God's continual protection over the staff who travel regularly and that the Service Center be fully equipped to better serve the needs of the national Bible Societies in this area; **Americas** – With prayers that the Service Center may enable the area's Bible Societies to respond with new strategies to engage young people's interest in the Bible and the Church and that the Bible Societies may help the churches to communicate the message of the Gospel in new ways that respond to the interests of young people and touch their hearts; **Europe-Middle East** – With prayers, during these times of many challenges and increased demands and pressures, that the Service Center continually seek the Lord's wisdom, that their vision be constant, their commitment unswerving, and their energy unfailing as they seek to do their utmost for his highest.

Activity Corner: "In God's Hands" Picture Frame

Supplies needed: Bible; construction paper (assorted colors); scissors; crayon or marker; glue or paste; photo of each household member; newsprint.

Read together Psalm 123 and discuss ways each of you looks to and depends on God. Write your response on a sheet of newsprint (and save these responses for later). Invite each one to trace their hand on a sheet of construction paper that has been folded in half to measure 8" x 5-1/2" (with their wrist against the fold). When cutting out the hand, maintain at least 5 inches against the fold. While the hands are folded, cut out the shape of a box, about 2 inches square. Affix each one's photo to the back so that the opened "hands" form a picture frame (about 2" x 4"). Then affix the frame to an 8-1/2" x 11" sheet of construction paper. Across the top, ask each one to write "I am always in God's hands." Conclude by praying a prayer based on the responses that were listed on newsprint.