July 4, 2021

A Rebellious People

Ezekiel 2: 1-5

Psalm 123

We are rebellious by nature. Individually and collectively, a rebellious component exists in us. This statement is not a value judgment; this statement is just that a statement.

Today we celebrate 4th of July-a day we proudly term Independence Day. As humorist Erma Bombeck describes today, “You have to love a nation that celebrates its independence every July 4th, not with a parade of guns, tanks, and soldiers who file by the White House in a show of strength and muscle, but with family picnics where kids throw Frisbees, the potato salad gets iffy, and the flies die from happiness."[[1]](#footnote-1)

“Sure, Fourth of July is about gathering, grilling, and inevitably running out of ice, but above all, it's about celebrating America as a nation”-a free and independent nation, because a group of colonists determined that taxation without representation was not independence. [[2]](#footnote-2) So the colonists rebelled. And today we have the “united” States of America, working toward the belief that all of humanity is created equal, as one nation. And as we work toward freedom, our rebellious nature is evident.

Adolescence is also known as a time of rebellion. As we individually work to develop and integrate our own identities and develop our freedom from our parents and families, streaks of rebellion are part of the process. I think most of us know of an adolescent that has refused to turn in homework or went somewhere that wasn’t on the approved list. Any parent, grandparent or teacher can name a few, more vivid illustrations of the rebellious teenage, perhaps even from our own rebellious streak. In the end though, the goal of maturity is to be interdependent not independent

Yet this rebellious nature is not a new phenomenon. The Bible is full of rebellion-the garden of Eden—Adam and Eve rebelling against boundaries for living, the Israelites and the Golden Calf-rebelling against what was at the center of their lives, and now today in this second part of the chapters that describe Ezekiel’s call process from God, God outright names the Israelites, a nation of rebels, a rebellious nation, a nation in exile in Babylon. Our ancestors are a rebellious people, not focusing on God and neighbor but self.

For God, in the time and space of Ezekiel, rebellion again takes on the form of transgressions or sins against God. Furthermore, God describes this rebellious nation as impudent and stubborn. Eugene Petersen in the Message translation of this passage provides an even more vivid picture of the rebel nation. Petersen’s interpretation has God saying about this group, ‘They’re a hard case, these people to whom I’m sending you—hardened in their sin.’ In this translation God goes on to explain, ‘They are a defiant bunch. Whether or not they listen, at least they’ll know that a prophet’s been here. But don’t be afraid of them, son of man, and don’t be afraid of anything they say. Don’t be afraid when living among them is like stepping on thorns or finding scorpions in your bed. Don’t be afraid of their mean words or their hard looks. They’re a bunch of rebels.”  Not a pretty picture.

Does any of this sound familiar even today?

After we understand God’s meaning of a rebellious nation, we can discern, as we imagine ourselves in this passage, if we are hearing this as the proclaimer or if this passage is directed toward us as the one whom Ezekiel is to give the message to. Are we the proclaimer or the recipient of the proclamation?

Let’s look at both angles and you can decide how God is speaking to you.

If we are called to be like Ezekiel, we are called by God. This passage is a one way conversation between God and Ezekiel. God is empowering Ezekiel to do this hard task of addressing a rebellious nation, so rebellious they have been separated from their homeland. God empowers Ezekiel, who is now sitting down after all of the visual images God presented in chapter one with six winged wheels to stand up through the power of the Spirit, which is the breath of God. God is giving a charge to Ezekiel, to speak to the Israelites as one sent by God. The exact message is detailed in the chapters to follow but essentially, Ezekiel is to identify to the Israelites their hardness, their turning from God and direct them back to God through repentance. This message will not be easy to give or receive. God says that outright, but easy is not God’s assignment. Ezekiel is to do what God commands and prophesy to the rebels, the exiles. As one commentator writes, “Ezekiel’s testimony and experience serves a cautionary reminder at the heart of the church, of being Christian, is not a set of activities but an encounter with the holy that knocks us off our feet and empowers us through the Holy Spirit.”[[3]](#footnote-3) According to this passage, we are measured by if we repeat the call; we are not measured by the results.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The job for the recipients is to listen, to take to heart the words, to repent and become interdependent with God and neighbor, living in joy filled mystical union. Listening is not an easy task either. Listening so as to become transformed is also a difficult task, but one that each one of us as rebellious human beings is called to do. We are called to be transformed to interdependent people and nations.

Perhaps a modern day Ezekiel comes in the form of video from the Skit Guys. Just like throughout the book of Ezekiel, this video shares visual images that grab our attention. Also like Ezekiel, this video centers on the Word of God to send the message. This word comes in the form of a Bible verse that calls us to turn toward God, to end our divisions, to heal ourselves and our home and to seek our independence through our dependency on God.

The Skit Guys Video “True Independence.”

On this independence day, as we prepare to picnic and watch fireworks, let us remember our own rebellious nature, one of division not unity, one of rejecting God’s commandments to love our neighbor as ourselves. Let us ponder how our true independence comes from our dependence on God, and even our interdependence with each other.

May God bless each one of us and the place we call home and the places others call home.

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1. https://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/g21074771/4th-of-july-quotes/?slide=7 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/g21074771/4th-of-july-quotes/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Andrew Foster Connors, “Pastoral Perspective,” *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 3, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Leanne Pearce Reed, “Homiletical Perspective,” *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 3, edited by David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)