

Proper 16 (21) - August 24, 2025

Ezekiel 22:1–8, 12; Psalm 50:1–6; Hebrews 10:26–31; John 5:19–24 (Inclusive Bible)

“Honor the one who sent me”

1. When I think about the task of preaching, my role is to bring some water to you.
  - a. Let me explain
    - i. In the Presbyterian Church, we have three groups of leaders who are ordained, or set apart, to specific ministries
      1. All of us are ordained to God’s service through baptism, so in that sense all of us are set apart to serve God.
      2. Then, based on functions in the life of the church, we ordain deacons, elders and pastors
      3. The ministry of deacons is of care, compassion, hospitality
      4. The technical term for elders is Ruling Elders, because they’re the ones who help guide the church, who help tend to and measure our spiritual growth
      5. There are two technical terms for pastors:
        - a. Minister of Word and Sacrament (because we lead in worship through preaching and the sacraments of baptism and communion)
        - b. Teaching Elder: because we help the church reflect on the meaning and message of scripture
    - ii. In that sense of Teaching Elder, I get to reflect with you on the Word of God in scripture and in one another
      1. Over the years I have landed on a metaphor which feels right to me as to how I do that
      2. You’ve called me to this role and you said: Preach God’s word
      3. I do that earnestly, with dedication, and some trembling, because this isn’t my pulpit, it’s God’s
      4. Bringing God’s word to the people is not something I take lightly nor something I take as a being about me
    - iii. So the metaphor I have as I work on a sermon is that you’ve asked me to go get you some water from God’s stream of Living Water
      1. I do that through prayer and study, taking my little bucket to the river
      2. The bucket is not fancy, it’s a bit old, has holes in it

3. I try to collect as much water as I can manage, and carefully bring it back to you, trying hard as I can not to spill too much on the way
  4. But inevitably, some gets lost between there and here
  5. So, the final part of my job as I share with you that water I managed to bring, is to point back to the actual source, to God's Living Water, and encourage you to make your way there yourselves
- iv. The preaching is about the water, not the bucket, not the waterboy
2. In our passage today, Jesus was, in a way, bringing water to the people on behalf of God.
    - a. Admittedly, the passage is a bit confusing as we consider the relationship of Jesus and Abba God
      - i. As I mentioned, Jesus was arguing with the religious authorities about the legality, the legitimacy of being able to heal on the Sabbath, the day of rest.
      - ii. Jesus' argument was that God was always at work, so Jesus would be too
      - iii. And as you can imagine that really angered the authorities, because they saw it as blasphemy, that Jesus was comparing or equating himself to God
      - iv. And Jesus doubles down speaking of God as parent, and more, as being the representative of God, the one God sent to act on behalf of God
      - v. Oh goodness. I can't imagine how angry that must have made them.
      - vi. And the thing is, with two thousand years of interpretation between that moment and now, we have pondered just exactly what Jesus meant
      - vii. After all, we declare there is only one God, so what is Jesus exactly if he is the "only begotten" of God? What does that mean?
      - viii. We've tried to merge our affirmation that we only worship one God, with the affirmation that Jesus is God too.
      - ix. As I said, it gets confusing, especially when Jesus leans into that image of being the one learning from God, and doing as God says, etc.
      - x. I am so grateful that you and I have honest conversations about theology on passages like this one, and some of you share your journey to figure out who Jesus is, from Jesus as God and part of the

Trinity, all the way to Jesus being a very special messenger whom God had sent

- xi. I'm not trying to tie a nice bow on this difficult subject, but I only want to highlight that we have a spectrum of theology on the topic of who Jesus is
- b. Regardless of how we view that relationship of Jesus and God, what Jesus is trying to do here is always to point towards God, not point towards himself.
  - i. Here there is probably more consensus among us, since what we see is Jesus trying to do that which God had been asking all of us to do, to behave in a way that is ethical, and compassionate and just.
  - ii. And Jesus healed and taught and spoke always with the message of God's arriving Reign, of repentance and turning to God, of living into and living up to the upside-down reality of how God would want things to run (the first are last, the weak are strong...)
  - iii. And always, ALWAYS, saying that the key was to do as God asked of us
  - iv. No matter what Jesus did, he always pointed back to the source of wisdom and love, back to God, back to those living waters.
- 3. You and I have our own ways to bring one another water from God's living waters
  - a. We, of course, are not Jesus, but we can learn from Jesus about that sense of acting on behalf of God, following God's lead in all that we do
  - b. Our efforts to live a faithful life are a response to God's love for us
    - i. In that sense, coming to church, doing good in the community, caring for one another, they are all things we do because we are thankful for what God has done for us, and so we're respond in this way
    - ii. We don't do good things to earn our way to heaven, and we don't work for justice to punish the perpetrators of injustice, and we don't build community to build power or prestige
    - iii. We do all of these things because of the one who sent us.
    - iv. And we tell people where that work of love, of mercy comes from
    - v. You may say that's Jesus, or that's God. Either way, it's the one who sent us: they're the source of that living water we carry as best we can
  - c. Whenever we act from that gratitude, our role is to carry that water, yes, but primarily to make the connection to God (and not to ourselves)
    - i. When we have communion, I say this is not the Presbyterian table
    - ii. When we serve Hot Meals, it's not the Presbyterian kitchen
    - iii. When we study together, it's not our wisdom or knowledge
    - iv. When we care for each other, it's not our big hearts
    - v. When we challenge injustice, it's not our holiness or righteousness

- vi. Anything we do is our imperfect effort to carry that water, that message, and never to forget to point to its source
4. It's a humbling thing, carrying this water, if we understand it as service to God. And it's a deeply emotional thing, since all of us are being sent to share without any filters that love and mercy from God. Doing it doesn't make us equal to Jesus, to God, but rather it reminds us we are imperfect instruments inviting people to experience the living water for themselves.

#### Reflection questions

1. Recall a teacher or mentor who opened your eyes to knowledge without calling attention to themselves but really let you experience a new world of learning for yourself.
2. In John 5:19 –24 says, basically, “if you dishonor me, you're dishonoring the one who sent me (God).” Why would people have such a visceral response to that statement (positive by following him, negative by seeking to destroy him)?
3. Think of a time when you truly felt that you were pointing to God through your actions (or of a time when your lost perspective and you let your good deeds point more towards you).