

Mandated Reporting

Ezekiel 33:7-11

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So sadly, evil is very real. While humans have nearly unlimited capacity to do good things, we can be very cruel too. Unspeakable harm has happened to children, the elderly, the disabled, and other vulnerable populations in homes, schools, churches, group homes, and among other organizations. One correction we are doing as a society is making mandated reporters.

Many debate the role of clergy as mandated reporters. Some states do mandate clergy to report abuse while New York does not at this time. Some people have much confusion over reporting verses confidentiality. Some people for example think of chaplains as clergy, but they are mandated reporters like everyone else in the healthcare system.

Anyway, in our passage today, Ezekiel, in his role of a prophet, becomes a mandated reporter through God's command, "whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'O wicked ones, you shall surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. But if you want the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved a life." God mandates Ezekiel to give the Word and hold accountable those committing wickedness.

Thankfully, we are not necessarily called to be prophets, most of us would prefer not to be. However, we do have the responsibility to protect the vulnerable and hold people accountable for harm and wickedness.

The name Ezekiel means *God Strengthens*. Surely, he needed strengthening to have the difficult conversations where he and his message are not welcome. Ezekiel came from a priestly family, and if circumstances were not being in exile, he might have become a priest. In this passage, Ezekiel's role is changing, though he is still a prophet. Before this 33rd chapter, Ezekiel's role was the warning of God's judgment. Now, he is commissioned to be a watchman for the house of Israel at a time of a new hope that the Israelites will be free again and return to a restored promised land. The word sentinel in the NRSV means someone who keeps watch.

The watchman imagery here underscores the role of human responsibility and accountability. Moreover, God chooses to work through human responsibility rather than bypass it. Indeed, God expects us to do our part. Of course, God can support and intervene at times. Without God's intervention in our lives, I would not be here in this church nor do I think I would see you in these pews. But God leaves us to be responsible for our lives and for those around us. We have great freedom. God does not really micromanage us at all (though that might not be true for Prophets). God wants sincere love from us; not a programmed, automated, superficial love.

In addition to mandate reporting, Ezekiel is also in a role of covenant emissary who gives warnings to serve as legal notifications. Of course, like mandated reporters, Ezekiel is responsible to do the reporting, or is held accountable for allowing the wickedness to continue. Likewise, mandated reporters are help responsible for failure to report. The difference between our contemporary mandated reporters and Ezekiel is that we currently report to government agencies, whereas Ezekiel was commissioned to tell the perpetrator to stop. He was not required to force them to stop, God handled that part. Ezekiel had to point out the errors. No easy task.

In both Ezekiel's time and our time, there is a movement to have a more just and merciful society amidst chaos and violence. Far too many times the church itself has failed to be a place of safety and trust. That holds true for many organizations and even schools. Our culture is full of broken families in need of healing. Much needs to be restored.

Regarding our nation as a whole, we get some things wrong. We incarcerate more citizens than any other country. Incidentally, at this moment in New York State, volunteers are barred from prisons as there is not enough staff to ensure their safety. Now, we are not easily the most evil country in the world. In some countries, people often have fewer rights and are quickly executed without any process. Though, that happens here at times too. We have a very imperfect healthcare system becoming increasingly expensive often with poorer outcomes.

In addition to mandated reporters, God will call prophets among us in the church. We saw an example of this on Friday as some six clergy were arrested for putting their bodies in front of the National Criminal Analysis and Targeting Center in Williston, Vermont. They spent time singing, praying, and reciting names of people killed while detained by immigration and customs enforcement in an effort to facilitate change in government policies and procedures to honor the dignity and humanity of all people. These clergy join a long line of others doing similar work over the centuries.

We have others who help. There are missions that we do even here locally. We have people like the Rev. Jeff Hood, a priest who accompanies people on death row through their execution as well as serving others involved such as families and prison guards. There are pastors, chaplains, and youth ministers. And, there is the backbone of it all, church members. These members who do all that is involved with the work of the church. Discipleship and proclaiming the gospel, service on boards and committees, caring for one another and the earth, offering of time, resources, and talents, all for the purpose of mutual flourishing in our congregations and the wider world.

As we partake in the Lord's Supper today, may we be ever mindful of the work of the church and the wider culture around us. Consider the wounded, displaced, victims of natural disasters and oppressive systems, and all of us who need healing. Be ever aware of Christ's presence with us and what we might be called to do today. Stay curious and courageous, be prepared when we are moved beyond our comfort zones, and trust in God in all times. The God who strengthened Ezekiel, and strengthens us in our times of challenge.