

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

**[An age-old problem.]**

I wonder if you’ve heard grumbling these days, maybe it went something like this:

“It’s the young people who’ve ruined things,  
with their strange music and avocado toast.

If only they were more like us; now get off my lawn!”

Or, maybe the grumbling went something like this instead:

“Just look around at the world we’re inheriting,  
And think of the one *we’ll* create!

*Their* mistake is they got old—that is not a mistake *we’ll* be making!

No sir, we’ll stay young forever!”

Well, that sort of grumbling —that sort of *sin*— was all the rage in Ezekiel’s day.

You see, it was more than 500 years before Jesus would be born.

God’s people had been taken away into captivity.

The Babylonians conquered Jerusalem because

God’s chosen people had turned away from him,

They had rejected *the* Lord as *their* Lord.

It had now been a full generation since they were taken from their homes in chains.

The young people had grown up in exile,

Never really knowing the homeland their Lord had given them,

Never really feeling like they belonged where their Lord had let them go.

And they blamed their parents.

In fact, people even had a proverb, a saying, to express the ‘inter-generational’ tension:

“*The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.*” (Ezekiel 18:2)

It meant “Our fathers did the bad stuff, and we’re the ones paying for it.”

It was their way of saying that society, the nation, the world—all creation—  
was headed downhill because of another generation.

Old folks and young folks alike would say it!

It placed the blame on ‘*them*,’

That ‘*other*’ group of people,

The ones who are so *different* from ‘*us*.’

**[The *real* generational problem.]**

Ezekiel may have lived more than 500 years before Jesus was born,  
but his world wasn't so very different from our own.

Then, as now, human beings suffered from an age-old condition: *Sin*.

The problem wasn't that one generation "ate sour grapes."

The problem *is* that Adam and Eve ate that forbidden fruit in the Garden.

That fruit which seemed a "delight to the eyes," (Genesis 3:6)

but really meant death to the soul. (Genesis 2:17)

Sin and death is what comes from human beings, (Romans 5:12)

generation after generation.

We've all tasted that 'sour' fruit.

All our teeth have been set on edge.

There is no '*other*,' no '*them*,' no '*different-from-us*' people to blame.

That age-old condition afflicts us all. We reject our Lord daily!

So what are we to do?

God gives us one answer from Ezekiel.

**[Enough already!]**

God sent Ezekiel to prophesy:

Enough already!

There'll be no more grumbling about what others have done!

No more silly proverbs about sour grapes and sideways teeth.

No more complaints about the world you've inherited or even avocado toast.

None of you get to pass the blame

Because we're all sinful.

"Instead," the Lord God says,

"All souls are *mine*; the soul of the father, as well as the soul of the son, is *mine*"

"And," the Lord God says...

"the soul who sins shall die."

Old and young both belong to Lord.

He alone decides *where* they live

and *when* they live

and even *that* they live.

He has planned every moment of life for them to share his love with the world.

Life itself is gift from the Lord.

Yet "the soul who sins shall die."

That age-old condition still afflicts us all. We reject our Lord daily!

So what are we to do?

God gives us an even clearer answer from Ezekiel, and it comes in one word: Repent.

**[The age-old answer: Repent!]**

At the end of this chapter, Ezekiel bids the people:

*Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.  
Cast away from you all the transgression that you have committed,  
and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!  
Why will you die, O house of Israel?  
For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God;  
So turn, and live.*

Repent.

That word has some connotations in our modern English that make it sound...

Unpleasant.  
Submissive.  
Perhaps even painful.

Repentance can certainly be these things, at times.

But what it really is, is simple; it is *'turning to God, to live.'*  
"Turn, and live."

Two-thousand years ago, more than 500 years after Ezekiel's people went into exile,

John the Baptist came with that same message:  
He said, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

He was preparing the way for One far greater, Who was bringing His Kingdom to sinners.

The Lord Jesus Christ said that same word; "Repent!"

Repent; do not point the blame to others.  
Repent; do not despair in your sin.  
Repent; and place your sins on Me, because I will take them to the Cross.  
"Turn to Me," the Lord says, "and live."

This is something we need reminding of daily.

When we are baptized, we become part of the church.

"Church." That word comes from the Greek *εκκλησια*,  
which literally means "called out ones."

You've been called out from this 'exile' in the world!

Your focus, called out ones, is not the disputes between generations or groups of people,  
But on the love between the Lord God and all people.

As we just sang:

*Let every kindred, ev'ry tribe on this terrestrial ball  
To Him all majesty ascribe and crown Him Lord of all!*

Let *the* Lord be *your* Lord! Remember what he has done for you at your Baptism!

In Baptism, the Lord cast away all your transgressions. (Ezekiel 18:30-32)

In Baptism, the Lord gave you that “new heart” and “new spirit.”

In Baptism, God turned you, and gave you spiritual life.

That age-old condition need no longer afflict you. The Lord has saved you.

**[Ageless guidance.]**

In joyful response to God for saving us from that age-old condition,

We should follow his age-old guidance.

Today’s reading from Ezekiel skipped 20 verses between verse 4 and verse 24.

Now... I understand why the people who put the lectionary together did so;

Those verses are very repetitive!

(You can read them at home, when you set aside time to study God’s Word.)

But what those verses repeat is, more-or-less, the 10 Commandments.

That Law of God which is good and wise

and teaches us how to love our neighbors here and now.

This means:

Life is not for looking backward (or forward) and pointing fingers.

Life is for the present.

Or, to be more exact: Life is for sharing the Good News with others *in the present*.

That’s what God has placed you in the world to do!

It doesn’t matter what time or place you’re living in.

The Coronavirus may make that ‘mission to others’ look a little different

(Maybe *more than a little* different...)

But you’re still called to do it.

And with that new heart and renewed spirit,

you *can*, by the grace of God.

Go and live a life of mission and praise—of constant *repentance*.

“*For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone,*” declares the Lord God; “*so turn, and live*”

So turn, and live. Amen.

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**So we... Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**

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