

Scripture Readings and Sermon

January 27, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

After a disaster, the question is often posed, "How do we start again?". Those who returned to Jerusalem at the end of the exile, this question must have been at the top of their mind. We have only two books from that period, Ezra and Nehemiah. When Nehemiah heard that even after the exiles began returning home Jerusalem was still in shambles, he requested leave to go and help "start again". After rebuilding the walls, Nehemiah turned to Ezra to rededicate the land to God. This passage comes from that re-dedication. Scholars argue that this section chronologically occurs after Chapter 8 in Ezra. To truly appreciate the story, the reader must imagine what it would be like to finally hear the word of God after being in exile so long. For some, they were born in exile or too young to remember but, for others, it was a hope of a memory they thought might never come true.

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Continuing the lesson from last week, Christians are given a variety of gifts because they are meant to work together in community. Paul uses the image of a body to describe how the community is bound together and interdependent. Since there is one Spirit which binds us into one body, there is no distinction based on race, culture, or economic status. While this is a very familiar passage, the implication are difficult to hear. Whether it was during the Civil War or the World Wars, much of our history is filled with Christians fighting Christians. Even social divisions such as race or immigration status divide the Body of Christ. There are a number of justifiable social reasons for these divisions but this passage seems to challenge all of them. Paul calls us to take seriously the claim that we are all children of God and that Jesus Christ died for us all. If we are failing to include "all" in our understanding of "all", we are reminded that we have all fallen short of the glory of God. For those times that we have fallen short, Jesus forgives but also calls us to do better.

Commentary on Luke 4:14-21 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

If you attend a synagogue today, a large scroll will be removed from a cabinet. The scroll will open where the last person finished reading. While in modern synagogues, this is usually one large scroll, at the time of Jesus the local synagogue had only a few scrolls depending on their size. Along with the Torah, Isaiah was one of the most popular. When Jesus was given the scroll, the scroll was already rolled to the 49th Chapter. Jesus picks up the reading at verse 8 and 9. It was fitting, therefore, that on the day he is back from his time in the wilderness, that this passage from this scroll was to be read on that day. After reading the scroll, the people waited for powerful sermon since everybody else had "praised" his teachings. Instead, he proclaims that the Spirit has been given to him to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor! To proclaim that after years of waiting, Isaiah was speaking about this hometown boy is scandalous. He has gone from teaching about God's message to being the Messenger of God. How would we feel if a member of the community made such a proclamation in church?

Sermon Summary (Youtube [Sermon Video](#))

After being driven by the Holy Spirit to the wilderness, Jesus began to proclaim the power of God to set the prisoners of sin free. As he preached in Galilee, he witnessed the power of this message and knew that he had been anointed for this purpose. How fitting, therefore, to arrive back home and be given a scroll from Isaiah that was at the exact place where Isaiah foretold this anointing. In that moment Jesus was living out the scripture he read. Whether or not the people were ready to hear is a lesson for next week but in that moment Jesus knew that the "joy of the Lord" is his strength.

What would it have been like to be in the synagogue at that moment? And what would it have been like to be in Jerusalem when the word was read by Ezra? The time of punishment and exile was finally over. After years of waiting in a hostile and foreign land, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt and the word of God was being read in the holy city. People began to weep for joy upon hearing words that they may have thought would never be read in their home again. They too felt that the joy of the lord was their strength.

People today are still hungry for that word. The words of freedom and hope. They may have forgotten what it is to hear the living word of God and not some dead book on the living room table. The living word that is being fulfilled through the Holy Spirit today by God's grace. And who will proclaim this word? The Body of Christ - you and me. We are anointed to preach good news to the poor and sight to the blind for we are the Body of Christ. Before we can proclaim this good news to those outside of the Body, we must first tend to the broken parts of our body. For if any in Christ suffer, we all suffer and if any are broken, we are all broken. We will continue to fail to bring the good news to life until we find that the joy of the Lord is our strength and that we are all one body.