

**Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 27, 2019,**

**Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21**

Our gospel lesson for today from Luke's account has Jesus in his hometown synagogue reading a text and proclaiming that he is the promised Messiah by reading these words from Isaiah,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

According to the commentaries I read, Luke places the visit to his hometown synagogue at the beginning of his ministry instead of later in the gospel account as did Matthew and Mark. He did so because he included the reading of the text from Isaiah as Jesus' mission statement, which did not appear in the versions of Matthew and Mark.

The commentator mentioned that this portion of the gospel as Jesus' mission statement is sorely overlooked by many Christians. He asserts that much of Jesus' ministry was to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free. Often times the church has focused on the spiritual dimension of Jesus' mission and ministry at the neglect of these social implications of the gospel.

Last week I saw on the news how the Rev. William Barber II had attended the Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration in Nashville, Tennessee. Newly elected Governor Bill Lee of Tennessee also attended. It is thought that he is the first Tennessee Governor to attend the MLK, Jr. celebration in decades. He gave a speech commending the late Dr. King, Jr., and said that much has been accomplished, but much more needs to be done.

Bishop Barber, who is co-founder of the Poor People's Campaign, (and the movement Moral Mondays) then got up to speak and said, "I do not celebrate him (Dr. King, Jr.). We do not celebrate martyrs. We join them." He then invited the crowd to stand up if they agreed with the policies that Dr. King fought to achieve. For example he asked to stand if they believed in universal health care. The crowd stood up, but Governor Lee did not. He also asked them to stand if they believed in raising the minimum wage, and once again the crowd stood up, but Governor Lee did not. He continued to give other examples, and Governor Lee did not stand up while the crowd did.

I bring up this example of Governor Bill Lee and the Rev. William Barber II as an example of how these Christians differ. Obviously, Bishop Barber believes that a main part of Jesus' mission is to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free. He believes in changing hearts and minds to make these a reality.

On the other hand, Governor Bill Lee who is a committed Christian has an obviously different viewpoint than Bishop Barber. I did not bring up this story to shame Governor Lee who in his own way was trying to reach out to citizens of his state that previous governors did not seek to touch. I brought up the story, because I could easily identify with Governor Bill Lee, and I believe that most of

us here could as well. Although I may have stood up for the policies that Bishop Barber were asserting, I wonder if I have done enough in my life to help the poor, the imprisoned, the blind and the oppressed.

As I was talking with my wife Karen about our ministry in the Episcopal Church, my entire ministry was spent among the middle class with people who could support themselves within the socio-political-economic system in which we live. I realize that I live a segregated life by class, and suspect that most of us here do as well.

I have become more aware of the hardships of the poor who struggle to make it in our society, as Karen has shared with me some of the financial challenges her clients have.

The recent government shut-down has revealed that many of the people in our nation are living on the edge, and are only one or two paychecks away from financial trouble. The shut-down also revealed how inter-dependent we are. As air traffic-controllers and TSA (Transportation Security Administration) workers started to call in sick, so they could find other part-time work to pay their bills, an airport in Maryland had to shut-down, and the safety of air travel became threatened.

The government shut-down revealed how interdependent we are, as expressed in the reading from Paul's first letter to the Church in Corinth for today (1 Corinthians 12:12-31a). Paul was talking about how the church community is interdependent as is the human body. But it is also true of our American society, or any society. We tend not to see our inter-connection because we live such segregated lives.

What help is there for us? Where is the good news? I found the good news in our reading from Nehemiah for today. Nehemiah returned from the exile as the Governor of the Persian Empire to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. The community had difficulty in rebuilding the ancient capital of Jerusalem without the walls. And when it was finally accomplished, he gathered all the people at the Water Gate. The Water Gate was one of the gates of the city, and it is significant that they met there, because it was a place where all the people regardless of station in life could come. They would not be segregated by whether or not they were priests, men or women. All the people who could understand were called to come and hear Ezra the scribe read the Torah, the commandments of God as revealed to Moses.

Now Ezra read from early morning to mid-day. (You think our worship services are long?) At the end of the reading the people wept. Now commentators have diverse opinions about why the people wept. Karen believes that they wept for joy, because they had not heard the Torah read before. I believe they wept because they felt convicted that they had not obeyed the commandments of God out of ignorance.

As the commentator on our lesson from Luke's gospel noted, many Christians are not aware that a major part of Jesus' mission, and therefore the church's mission is to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor for the poor, the imprisoned, the blind and the oppressed. Like the people of ancient Jerusalem, we too may weep out of sorrow.

But Nehemiah reminded the people not to weep, but to feast, to eat and drink and to share with those who do not any provision, because this day is holy to the LORD God. In other words, once we have been convicted as God's people once again, we are to rejoice in being God's people and to share what we have and include those who do not have what they need. This is good news! We are God's people, and can serve God by rejoicing in the life God has given us, and by sharing the blessings we have received. Amen.

**I propose to show that I and the rest of the church overlook Jesus's mission statement as found in our gospel lesson from Luke so that by becoming self-aware of this oversight, we might consider how we can faithfully follow our Lord Jesus to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.**

Amen.

## **The Collect**

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **Old Testament**

### **Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10**

All the people of Israel gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

## **The Psalm**

### **Psalm 19**

Caeli enarrant

1 The heavens declare the glory of God, \*  
and the firmament shows his handiwork.

2 One day tells its tale to another, \*  
and one night imparts knowledge to another.

- 3 Although they have no words or language, \*  
and their voices are not heard,
- 4 Their sound has gone out into all lands, \*  
and their message to the ends of the world.
- 5 In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun; \*  
it comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber;  
it rejoices like a champion to run its course.
- 6 It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens  
and runs about to the end of it again; \*  
nothing is hidden from its burning heat.
- 7 The law of the LORD is perfect  
and revives the soul; \*  
the testimony of the LORD is sure  
and gives wisdom to the innocent.
- 8 The statutes of the LORD are just  
and rejoice the heart; \*  
the commandment of the LORD is clear  
and gives light to the eyes.
- 9 The fear of the LORD is clean  
and endures for ever; \*  
the judgments of the LORD are true  
and righteous altogether.
- 10 More to be desired are they than gold,  
more than much fine gold, \*  
sweeter far than honey,  
than honey in the comb.
- 11 By them also is your servant enlightened, \*  
and in keeping them there is great reward.
- 12 Who can tell how often he offends? \*  
cleanse me from my secret faults.
- 13 Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins;  
let them not get dominion over me; \*  
then shall I be whole and sound,  
and innocent of a great offense.
- 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my  
heart be acceptable in your sight, \*  
O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

## **The New Testament**

### **1 Corinthians 12:12-31a**

Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts.

## **The Gospel**

### **Luke 4:14-21**

Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

**In preparation for this coming Sunday's worship, please pray this coming Sunday's Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below**

**The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany**

**Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30**

***The Collect***

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

***Old Testament***

**Jeremiah 1:4-10**

The word of the LORD came to me saying,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the LORD said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';  
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
and you shall speak whatever I command you,  
Do not be afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you,

says the LORD."

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth.  
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,  
to pluck up and to pull down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant."

***The Psalm***

**Psalm 71:1-6**

***In te, Domine, speravi***

1 In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge; \*  
let me never be ashamed.

2 In your righteousness, deliver me and set me free; \*  
incline your ear to me and save me.

3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe; \*  
you are my crag and my stronghold.

4 Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked, \*  
from the clutches of the evildoer and the oppressor.

5 For you are my hope, O Lord GOD, \*  
my confidence since I was young.

6 I have been sustained by you ever since I was born;  
from my mother's womb you have been my strength; \*  
my praise shall be always of you.

## *The New Testament*

### **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

## *The Gospel*

### **Luke 4:21-30**

In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, and began to say, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also

in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.