

Sermon for Sunday 26 January 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Scriptures: Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalter: 750 (*Response 1*)Psalm 19 ; 1 Corinthians 12 :12-31a ; Luke 4 :14-21

Sermon

We're still in the Epiphany season, announcing how the Jesus story developed ... but as usual with a good, useful story, you wander a bit. Remember, Jews never forget Christians took THEIR scriptures and called them their own, and nobody ever gave Jews as much trouble over the centuries as who? Christians!

So, today's first lesson is from Nehemiah, describing how the people of Israel built around a book ... in this case, a time when they were rebuilding themselves and got help from a history book they found in their temple, and spent all day reading and weeping and vowing to practice all its commandments and illustrations. Remember, everything about Jesus was Jewish, and he followed the law of Moses and the prophets all the traditions of Israel, from start to finish. So we remind ourselves, every Sunday, and every prayer-time, about the importance of our Book the Bible, over and over.

Then we studied Psalm 19 for its terrific blend of creation and covenant. Jesus never got far in his examples or actions without these two fundamental guideposts for human beings.

Then we're reading sequentially sections of Paul's letter to the church he founded in Corinth, Group life is essential to Jesus people. Life not only relates to Jesus, but literally IS Jesus, risen and connected in one body. You can't just be on your own. God is doing a new thing, and everybody has a part, a job, and an attitude that blends into one whole. That's how Jesus advanced as a grown man...as part of a collection of friends. Together.

And finally, we have Jesus showing up at home, in Galilee, after he'd launched his career of teaching and healing. His home territory was Galilee, and the town of Nazareth, and it was the Sabbath, and he went as always with his neighbors to synagogue, and they gave him the honor of choosing and reading the scripture, and he did so, choosing a memorable passage about God's promise to come and heal and guide everyone through the Spirit. And Jesus gave the scroll back, and sat down, and commented with strong conviction, "Today this is coming alive right among yourselves and me."

That's how our readings today close.

The thing that stands out in all this, to me, this day, is how clearly we're hearing, and telling ourselves, and asking God to help us believe and put into action, the Spirit of trust and love all around and within us..

The news is full of what's happening and how things are going to be different and ... you know, the first 100 days and all that.

Listen to it. Give it your attention. Don't let it take over, though. That's not your inside truth.

Be glad of that. Live on more than that.

There used to be an old hymn called, "Look for the beautiful." I close with that. Our job is to affirm our opportunity ... our obligation ... our purpose to demonstrate, the glory and goodness of God on all sides, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, "therewith to be content," as the Apostle Paul states it. To build on God's grace, whatever our circumstances.

Lord, lead us in this approach, at all times, and now.

Amen.