



3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY — January 24th, 2016  
NEHEMIAH 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; PSALM 19:72;  
1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31A; LUKE 4:14-21

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**A READING FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH**

All the people 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 worshipped 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."

NEHEMIAH 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

**PSALM 19**

- 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 judgements 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.

*Gracious creator of heaven and earth, your Word has come among us as the true Sun of righteousness, and the good news of his birth has gone out to the ends of the world. Open our eyes to the light of your law, that we may be purified from sin and serve you without reproach for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Light and our Life. Amen.*

### **A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS**

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 honourable we clothe with greater honour, 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 honour 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 honoured, 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.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31A

### **THE HOLY GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO LUKE**

Then 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 favour.” 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.”

LUKE 4:14-21

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*“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 favour.”*

*Not my problem! Not my problem! Nope, not my problem!* How many times do we hear that phrase? To be sure, we have to be careful of having people repeatedly dumping all of their bad decision making in our laps for us to fix. For sure, there are people who get through life by having everyone else fix the messes that they habitually make for themselves and often for others. For such people, we are very tempted to say, *Not my problem*.

At the same time we are seeing more and more in society who are relatively well off using the *Not my problem* phrase to avoid taking on any responsibility for the plight of so many who are in need in our western societies. Not only do they see the problem as not being theirs — they also are quick to point out that they really do not care. For they believe that most of the folk who are impoverished reside in the making of their own laziness. And such judgmental folk always seem to have an anecdotal horror story or two to back up their views. My email 'in box' frequently receives propaganda from a variety of folk which support such warped and unrealistic views.

Of course, some people like to elevate their own lives by comparing themselves with other people whom they see as lesser. Some observers of history point out that there is a human tendency at times to enjoy in a perverse way looking down upon others who are viewed as not really measuring up. This trait can actually become a dangerous thing. For it can all too easily become a useful tool for those bent on stirring up unrest or fomenting a war, or more. I think we are seeing this going on today — and many are becoming quite tired of it. The danger is that we may become so numb to this that we don't even notice anymore. Worse yet, we might even find ourselves beginning to start accepting the logic of such misguided views.

I received an anti-immigrant email a few days ago which listed a host of problems between refugees and hospitals in another country. The sad tale had no letterhead or source on it. It also had no signature or name at the end. There was nothing to support it. But disturbingly the person who sent it to me took it at face value as being fully true. We need to be very careful about how we build our views — our outlook in life.

Enter Jesus! We hear today how Christ, in a few words had much to say to the people of his hometown synagogue. He has much to say to us as well. The question is — are we more willing than his old town neighbours to listen to what he has to say to us?

Consider our Lord's reference to the 'poor'. Jesus brings attention to the poor when he reads, *he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor*. And just who are the poor? We usually assume that the poor are those who have a low financial income. Yes, such folk are monetarily 'poor'. But we often also hear of students being concerned about 'poor grades', for another example. Poor can mean a lacking in any way where there is a need.

So who is Jesus talking about when he reads, *he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor*?

I think our Lord is talking about all of us. For who among us doesn't find themselves to be lacking in various aspects of our lives? How many of us do not see any room for improvement in our faith-based lives? How many of us do not want to have a better understanding of God, and God's relationship with us? How many would not like to come to know God better? I think that we are all impoverished in ways that we may not always articulate well? — or even be aware of?

**Yes**, Jesus came to provide the good news to the poor. May we be humble enough to say that in some ways, we too are among the poor — we too welcome the good news of Jesus Christ — we too want to walk closer with God. When we do so, we find our hearts open to helping all those around us, no matter what kind of poverty in which they find themselves. It is a joy to see how we are responding to the call for us to actively be helping with the refugee crisis. We are called to continue remaining faithful in doing what we can to help those who are without sufficient funds as well as those who are poor in other ways.

**Jesus** has much to say to the world. Jesus has much to say to us. Jesus reaches out to us over and over again. May we be humble enough to say, *Thank you Jesus, we are listening.*