

January 26th, Proper 3

Opening Prayers:

In you, O Lord our God, we find our joy
for we are the people you formed
in mercy and freedom,
justice and righteousness.
Keep us open to your Spirit in our midst
that we who are Christ's body
proclaim the Good News
of your release to captives,
sight to the blind,
freedom to the oppressed,
and the favour of your salvation
for the whole world.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit is one God,
now and for ever

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10: *We do not know what part of the Law of Moses Ezra the scribe read to the people, but whatever it was, it made them sad. Ezra would have been reading in Hebrew with the Levitical priests interpreting it in Aramaic, the common language of the people. The Levites preached that no matter what it was they may have done wrong, they are not to go away sad ("eat the fat and drink the sweet wine") for this day is holy to the Lord and that the joy of the Lord would be their strength.*

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.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27: *Paul had written that God's gifts come through the Spirit for the benefit of the whole Church. Then he turned his attention to the nature of the Church, using the analogy of the human body. Diversity and differences within the membership of the Body of Christ actually add to our unity. In fact, the Church needs this variety in order to fulfil the ministry entrusted to it by God.*

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.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Luke 4:14-21: *Having been tempted by the Devil in previous verses, Jesus returned to lowly Galilee (where many people were a mix of Jew and Gentile, and where the religious weren't too religious). As was his custom, Jesus attended the local synagogue. Jesus rewound the scroll to another portion of Isaiah than the reading for the day. What Jesus read was that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him and that he had come for the poor. The Galileans were poor in many ways: financially, their poor standing in Israel, and their lack of respect among the religious elite.*

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.’

The Word of God is living and active. It does not return empty but accomplishes the purposes for which it is spoken. When you deal with the Word, you are dealing with some live wires, the power of God for salvation.

Even today, the Word remains the Word of the Lord. Living and active. Powerful. Breathing the very breath of God. And when it goes out from mouths into ears and into minds and hearts, it does things. It convicts old Adam and Eve and raises up Christ. It knocks us off our thrones and picks us up from our knees. It fills the hungry and sends away the sated. There is no neutrality when it comes to the Word.

In Jerusalem at the Water Gate at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, it was faith. The people were gathered as one, packed tightly together, demanding to hear from the Torah of Moses. Men, women, children all stood and listened for six hours, from early morning to midday, to hear those words they hadn’t heard together in more than a generation. And Ezra blessed the Lord, and the people answered with their “Amen, Amen” with faces to the ground, worshipping and praising God for the goodness of His Word. It was a holy day, a day filled with the Word, a day of feasting on fat and drinking the sweet wines and sharing with neighbours. It was a day of rejoicing, “for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” The returning exiles were glad and eager to hear the Word of the Lord that had been silent for so long. It was like a rain after a long drought, and the people drank it up and wanted more.

It was a holy day in Nazareth too, Jesus’ hometown, the place where he grew up. They remembered Jesus when he was just “knee high to a grasshopper” and now he’s all grown up and famous. Working miracles, preaching the kingdom, gathering a following, making headlines. Now he was in the synagogue, the local boy made good come to his home congregation. The place was packed, as you might expect. Everyone wanted to hear from Jesus.

The attendant handed the scroll of Isaiah to Jesus, and he looked for a particular passage. Isaiah 61. It would be as if someone came to the Lectern and rather than read the appointed text for this morning went searching through the Lectionary Book until they found the passage they wanted to read! Of course, no one would ever do that (well, hopefully!), but that is exactly what Jesus did. he is the eternal

Word of God, after all, with all authority, as he revealed to the people gathered in that synagogue that glorious day.

Then Jesus read the passage out loud to the people: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

What Jesus was saying was that he was the "anointed One," the Messiah, the One whom God has sent full of the Spirit to bring freedom and life to the captives. People had wondered for centuries about whom Isaiah was talking. Jesus says to his hometown congregation that it's him! He's the One. And they're hearing him with their own ears. And they approved, and spoke well of Jesus, and marveled at what he was saying.

But then they started thinking about it, and they remembered Jesus from when he was young. He played in their streets. He hung out with their kids. Joseph's son. Mary's boy. Who does he think he is, anyway? He leaves home, runs around with that rebel cousin named John, and now he comes back and thinks he's the Messiah. Well, we'll see about that. Prove it, Jesus! We've heard the reports, all those miracles, like when you turned water into wine. Do a few here for the hometown crowd. Then we'll believe you, but until then....

The new you in Christ is a different kind of hearer. A faithful hearer. A Water Gate at Jerusalem hearer. One who is willing, even eager, to stand at the Water Gate for hours upon hours to hear the Word of God and delight in it. The you that was born in Baptism. The you that is in Christ. The you that God is delighted to call you, His child. The you that delights in the Word of God and meditates upon it day and night.

Hear the Word of the Lord. Today the Scriptures are fulfilled in your hearing. Your sins are forgiven. You stand justified before God. You are His baptismal child. You have a place at His table. You have freedom to live, life for eternity, forgiveness of your sins, strength and joy to live this life to the praise and honour of God and in loving service of those whom the Lord puts in your path.

Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Concluding Prayers

Let us pray for Christian people around the world, that we may become one as Christ wills us to be.

Let us pray for all who hear and read God's word with faith, that the Spirit may touch their hearts with joy.

Let us pray for all members of the body of Christ that we may use the gifts God has given us to build up the kingdom of peace and love.

Let us pray for ourselves, that we may heed the Spirit's call to help all in suffering or affliction and to bring the good news of God's love to all.

Let us pray for Charles, our king, and all in authority in this country and for those in positions of power in all the nations of the earth, that they might bring good news to the poor and those in any need, let us pray to the Lord.

Let us pray for the sick and the dying, and those who minister to them; for those who mourn their beloved dead; for all in crisis or need; for those who have asked for our prayers.

Lord God,
whose compassion embraces all peoples,
whose law is wisdom, freedom and joy for all;
fulfil in our midst your promised favour,
that we receive the gospel of salvation with faith
and, anointed by your Spirit,
freely proclaim it.
Grant this through your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

For our Parish.

O GOD the Holy Ghost, Sanctifier of the faithful:
Sanctify this parish by thine abiding presence
especially at this time when some feel they cannot gather together.
Enlighten the minds of thy people more and more
with the light of the everlasting Gospel.
Bring erring souls to the knowledge of God our Saviour;
and those who are walking in the way of life,
keep steadfast unto the end.

Give patience to the sick and afflicted,
and renew them in body and soul.
Guard from forgetfulness of thee those who are strong and prosperous.
Increase in us thy manifold gifts of grace,
and make us all to be fruitful in good works;
O blessed Spirit, whom with the Father and the Son together
we worship and glorify, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

THE peace of God, which passeth all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord:
And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you
always. *Amen*