

January 27, 2010; Epiphany 3; "Today"

Lections: Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5, 6, 8-10; Ps.19; 1Corin 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

The Epiphany season is a time when the church gives us windows to look through in the hope that the community of faith will find God at work and take heart.

We begin with Nehemiah where we see a community needing a new beginning. Post-exile, these people had gathered in an open space; we could say they were in lament for all they had suffered and lost. They gathered at the water gate; much like the people of Haiti who can only gather in places where no more walls will fall on them or their loved ones. Then and now, God's care, God's desire is a path of renewal, a time of transformation. Beauty in the words delivered, in hope held out and placed next to the lament. Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your hearing. I wonder who is telling the people that the joy of the Lord is their strength, who is giving them water this morning.

The body Paul speaks about in Corinthians is working; each part, large and small have gathered in diversity functioning together. Today teams from all over the world are acting as God's agents, binding up those broken in body, mind or spirit. The Turkish search and rescue teams, the Israeli medical units, the American hospital ship anchored close by, the Canadians delivering food and medicine and carrying orphans off of planes in Ottawa, and singing their hearts out for donations. We see beauty in this well functioning diversity, essential for healing – no one could do it alone.

These lessons are being read and seen all over the world this morning; the common lectionary is shared by Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists. They are a timely and living word today. They offer a glimpse of who the church is and what the church does – how the church is being the church. This fresh awareness means that we are reading a living word. And preparing ourselves for it to live in us.

In Luke's gospel Jesus himself comes forward as the sacred story of God, embodied for all to read, says one commentator. The texts of the prophets take life and form in him for the life of the world. He enters the synagogue, the place where his formation happened, where he has listened to the narrative of God working in history, and he takes his own place in the sacred story. He finds his mission, his life purpose in this particular text from Isaiah – bringing good news to the poor.

What is the text that gives you the deepest sense of God's mission and the purpose of your own life? Does it come to you alone or in the midst of community as it did for Jesus? I asked some friends this week about their life texts and I remembered my own. This week was the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of my ordination, a good time to remember and recommit to my own vows. Jesus declared to those around him that this would be his work as an agent of God – a mission that his followers would extend to all the diversity of the human family with particular attention to the broken places.

On Tuesday at the diocesan cathedral we saw the launch of the Cornerstone Foundation, a \$2 million project for housing poor homeless women, half of the rooms devoted to

those who are older. The announcement celebrated the partnerships of government, the Anglican diocese, medical agencies and a group of Roman Catholic nuns, the Gray Sisters. The nuns gave the project \$1 million. The diversity of social justice advocates gave us hope that God is fulfilling a joy today. I wish you had been in the room with me; it was a taste of the kingdom. Today the texts are fulfilled in your hearing

Yesterday the second group of young people going to New Orleans gathered to reflect together on their mission text from Jeremiah 29. In it we hear a message to exiles about rebuilding the city, planting gardens, loving enough to plan a future. The media spotlight is no longer on this location of suffering and lament in the southern United States but the good news to the poor is still our mission mandate. You count to God and to us – you are not forgotten. Today the texts are fulfilled in your hearing.

Vashti Mackenzie became the first female bishop in the history of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Her autobiography is entitled Not Without a Struggle, highlighting the often hard journeys of those whose desire to follow God's mission; often it means facing difficult times. She and her colleagues developed a list of faith statements as their mandate for mission. There are ten of them, reminding us of the law given through Moses to the people of Israel, an echo of that was in the lesson from Nehemiah.

If we want to join in our life mission, in fulfilling a text and bringing joy and strength in God's name we might pay some attention to these lessons for the struggle:

1. thou shall be prepared – spiritually, emotionally, physically – to serve God
2. thou shall be a team player, working collaboratively and supportively of each other.
3. thou shall network for ideas, advice, information; no one knows it all
4. thou shall be accountable
5. thou shall empower others
6. thou shall use sound management principles and techniques, knowing something about group processes and systems
7. thou shall be committed to the servant leadership model of Jesus the Christ
8. thou shall pursue continuing education and personal development in order to be a disciple
9. thou shall develop, pursue, and establish an ethic and an ethos grounded in prayer and scripture
10. thou shall be accessible to God in Christ and to those you are called to serve.

Today the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.  
Amen+

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