

Epiphany 3



Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you sent your Son to proclaim your kingdom and to teach with authority. Anoint us with the power of your Spirit, that we, too, may bring good news to the afflicted, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captive; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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

[{7:73b} When the seventh month came--the people of Israel being settled in their towns--] {8:1} 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. {2} 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. {3} 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.... {8:5} 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. {6} 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.... {8} So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. {9} 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. {10} 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."

[73b: I would encourage the reader to include this verse to provide a proper starting point for the reading.]

the seventh month: This is the seventh month of the 20th year of Artaxerxes (458 b.c.e.). See also 8:2.

the people of Israel...settled in their towns: The exiles have returned; the wall of Jerusalem has been built; and the people who were working on the wall have returned to their towns.]

2-3: The priest Ezra the scribe begins to read the book of the law from early morning to midday on the first day of the seventh month in the square before the Water Gate in Jerusalem.

[4, 7: These verses list the people who stood beside Ezra as he read.]

8. *with interpretation:* "Apparently Ezra read from the Hebrew while the Levites gave what he read in Aramaic and so assisted in making the law intelligible to the people, though the whole matter is far from clear.... The rabbis thought this was the first mention of the Targum." [1]

the reading: miqra' in Hebrew. "Later on the word meant 'Scripture'; the transitional stage may be reflected here." [2]

9. *Nehemiah...Ezra...the Levites...said to all the people:* The verb "said" is singular, and "Nehemiah," and "the Levites" are regarded as secondary.

"This day is holy to the Lord your God, do not mourn or weep: The people were apparently very moved by the reading of the law. But this was to a joyous reconstituting of the nation and the people are admonished not to weep but instead to celebrate, and to provide for those who had nothing.

10: The holy day was to be celebrated with feasting, "for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Psalm 19

{1} The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. {2} Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. {3} There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; {4} yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, {5} which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. {6} Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat. {7} The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; {8} the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; {9} the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. {10} More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. {11} Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. {12} But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. {13} Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. {14} Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

"It has been recognized for a long time already that Psalm 19 is composed of two psalms. Section A deals with hymnic praise of Yahweh in nature, Section B with the glory of the [*torah* "law"].... Tradition has welded the two together.... We have the obligation... to inquire into the reason for the combination and for its meaning." [3] "...the hymn of creation of which Psalm 19A speaks is a message that cannot be perceived by humans.... The cosmos celebrates God's [*kabod*, "glory"], but does not teach his will. For that reason Psalm 19B has been added as a decisive direction, as it were, to reveal the deciphered code word. In the [*torah* "law"]—there God is perceivable, that is where we recognize who god is." [4]

1-6: Songs without words are sung by heaven and earth in praise of Yahweh. Like the sun whose course encompasses the heavens, the silent voice of the firmament spans the earth with the knowledge of God.

7-10. *law...decrees...precepts...commandment...fear...ordinances*: The qualities of Yahweh's law are perfection, dependability, righteous, plain, pure and true.

10-11: The law is of great value and reward.

12-13. *hidden faults...the insolent*: "...there are infractions and unintentional failures that give rise to accusation (v. 12). Praise (vv.7-10) suddenly turns into a petition that Yahweh may absolve 'his servant' of all the failures of which he is unaware." [5]

14: Psalm 19B closes with a formula of dedication (cf. Ps. 104:34; 119:108). [6]

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

{12} For 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. {13} 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. {14} Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. {15} 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. {16} 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. {17} 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? {18} But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. {19} If all were a single member, where would the body be? {20} As it is, there are many members, yet one body. {21} 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." {22} On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, {23} 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; {24} whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, {25} that there may be no

dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. {26} If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. {27} Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. {28} 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. {29} Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? {30} Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? {31} But strive for the greater gifts.

12. all the members of the body...are one boy, so it is with Christ: This is no just a figure of speech, a metaphor, but rather a description of the mystical reality of the "body of Christ" (verse 27).

13. Jews or Greeks, slaves or free: Human distinctions are irrelevant; we were all baptized into one body, we all drank of one Spirit.

14-25: The body is made up of many parts (members). No member can decline to be a part of the body, nor can one part of the body reject another member. Each member has its proper place; even those that seem to be weaker are indispensable and indeed receive greater honor.

26-27: In the church, the body of Christ, all share a common lot.

28: Paul describes the various tasks the members of the church perform, or the positions they have.

31. strive for the greater gifts: Though all of the gifts of the Spirit are necessary for the life of the church, so are greater. These are not specified. The only hint seems to be in verse 22, where the weaker members are deemed indispensable. This would be in keeping with Jesus' teaching that "the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:26-27).

Luke 4:14-21

{14} Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. {15} He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. {16} 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, {17} and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: {18} "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, {19} to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." {20} 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. {21} Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

14-15. Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit.... was praised by everyone: This picks up a theme from the Infancy narratives, namely that Jesus enjoyed the favor of his fellow Israelites. "Luke often emphasizes the universal reaction of people to Jesus activity (5:26; 7:16; 9:43; 18:43; 19:37)". [7]

15, 16, 20. synagogue: Properly this is not a building, but a gathering, like a church is not the building but the congregation. Still, Jesus taught *in* their synagogues, and he *went to* the synagogue, so a building, or a place within a building was probably intended.

18-19: Isaiah 61:1-2.

he has anointed me to proclaim release to the captive...the year of the Lord's favors: "The captives here are probably debtors in prison for nonpayment. The release proclaimed would then be that of the Jubilee Year in which all debts were canceled. The 'year of the Lord's favor' (v. 19) would be a Jubilee Year, a year-long sabbath!" [8]

21. Today this scripture has been fulfilled: The prophecy is fulfilled. The Servant of the Lord is identified.

Reflection

The season of Epiphany is concerned with God's manifestation or revelation of himself in ways that human beings can grasp. At Sinai God provided his people with the law, so that they might know God's will, and be sanctified and become holy. When they returned from the exile Ezra read them the law and told them to provide for those who had nothing. Christ's mission was to bring good news to the poor and free the oppressed. Now as members of Christ we are one body. We are honored and suffer together. And the gifts we have are for the sake of the whole body. Throughout the centuries of God's dealing with human beings, the most difficult lesson for us to learn is that we do not live in God's presence as individuals, but as a community, loving and serving one another as we love and serve God.

Hymns [9]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

87 --E--Hail to the

380 --D--O Christ, Our

531 --I--Before Jehovah's

829s --P--Canticle of the

757v --P--Creating God

355 --II--Through the Night

--II--707v, 703v/763s, 710v

360 --G--O Christ, the

312, 275, 820s, 726v 710v

Prayers of the People [10]

Presider or deacon

Having heard the scripture, let us earnestly call on God for the needs, concerns, and hopes of all peoples.

Deacon or other leader

For the church of Jesus Christ in every place.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters, deacons, and all who minister in Christ.

For this holy gathering and for all the body of Christ.

For this country, for all nations and their leaders, and for those who guard the peace.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

For the dying and the dead.

For ourselves, our families, and those we love.

Remembering the blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, hear the prayers of your people and send your Spirit with us as we proclaim good news to the poor; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

[1] Jacob M Myers, *Ezra Nehemiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1965, p. 154.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

[3] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*: Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, pp. 268f.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[5] *Loc. cit.*

[6] *Loc. cit.*

[7] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1981, p. 524.

[8] Bruce Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 309.

[9] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

[10] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>