

Notes for Next Sunday

Third Sunday after The Epiphany

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10). A remnant of the Israelites had returned and settled in their towns. In verse 1-3 and 5-6 they have assembled in Jerusalem. They told Ezra the scribe to read the Book of the Law of Moses. To show how hungry they were for God's Word, they stand listening to Ezra from the break of day to noon. Then some Levites instructed the people concerning the meaning of the Scripture that had been read to them. This last part would compare favorably to our Bible classes.

Epistle (1 Corinthians 12:12-31a). In this segment concerning spiritual gifts Paul tells the Corinthians of the proper use of these gifts. He points out that they as Christians are a part of the Body of Christ. This began when they were baptized by the Holy Spirit into this body. He drives home the point that no gifts are to be looked down upon and seen as unimportant. All gifts are needed and all have their specific purpose.

Gospel (Luke 4:16-30). This text has Jesus going to Nazareth where he been brought up. As the guest rabbi, He read the Scripture of the day. It was from Isaiah and pointed to Jesus. When Jesus tells them that this Scripture has been fulfilled in Him the crowd becomes hostile because, after all, they were very familiar with His humble background. They went so far as attempt to throw Him of high hill. Because it is not right time for Jesus to die, He simply passes right through the crowd and goes on His way.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

¹ all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. ³ He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. ⁵ Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. ⁶ Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" ⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear ^a and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. ⁹ Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

The people took the initiative in asking Ezra to read from God's Law. One task Ezra set for himself was to teach God's "statutes and rules in Israel." This no doubt was the first five books of the Bible. Ezra had to limit himself to selected portions of the Law (he probably read mostly from Deuteronomy (v. 2).

The seventh month (September/October) was an especially important one in the Israelite religious calendar. Four festivals took place during this month: Festival of Trumpets which modern Jewish people celebrate as Rosh Hashanah (new Year's Day); Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur); Festival of Booths or Ingathering; and The sacred assembly (v. 2).

The audience included women as well as men and also children old enough to receive instruction (vv. 2-3) The reading could not continue into the afternoon and perhaps the evening in order to cover all five books because the priests were needed during the afternoon to offer the required sacrifices (v. 3).

The people evidently stood for five or six hours, listening attentively to the reading and explanation of the Scriptures (v. 5).

Praise of God before reading the Scripture has a long history. Today the congregation customarily stands (as did the people in this verse) before the reading of the Holy Gospel, which is introduced with liturgical praise. It is also like when we say "This is the Word of the Lord" and "Thanks be to God." (vv. 5-6).

The Levites repeated the words loudly and distinctly for all to hear and perhaps paraphrased in Aram what Ezra read in Hebrew (v. 6).

Evidently, what the people heard Ezra read made them realize that they had cause to grieve in repentance for their sins. Grief over breaking God's Law is always in order (v. 9).

Epistle – 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

One Body, Many Parts

¹² The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those

with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?³¹ But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

12:12 a unit ... many parts. The image of the body was often used by Greco-Roman authors concerned for the unity of the body politic. Here Paul's concern is the unity of the church. The analogy of the body and its members was a favorite of his. (CC p. 444)

12:13 all baptized by one Spirit into one body.† Through baptism, a means of grace, the Holy Spirit produces faith in believers and makes them members of Christ's body, the Christian church (cf. Jn 3:3, 5). (CSB)

12:14-20 Addressed mainly to those who feel that their gifts are inferior and unimportant. Apparently the more spectacular gifts (such as tongues) had been glorified in the Corinthian church, making those who did not have them feel inferior. (CSB)

12:21-26 Addressed mainly to those who feel that their gifts are superior and most important. These verses provide another indication that some gifts, like tongues, had been magnified as being preeminent. (CSB)

12:23 the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. Modesty accentuates the importance of the sexual organs, which God located out of view and behind hair to reserve them for special, honorable use. (TLSB)

12:28 The list here differs somewhat from that in vv. 8-10. Paul notes three of the gifted individuals of Eph 4:11, then five of the spiritual gifts listed in vv. 8-10. The apostles and prophets were part of the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20), and teaching was associated with the pastoral office (Eph 4:11; 1Ti 3:2). These three gifted individuals are listed as "first," "second" and "third," indicating their importance in the church. The rest of the list is introduced with "then," indicating the variety that follows. Paul's lists of spiritual gifts seem to be largely random samples. (TLSB)

12:29-30 Are all apostles ... ? Christians have different gifts, and no one gift should be expected by everyone. He also refutes the teaching that all must speak in tongues as evidence of the Spirit. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Luke 4:16-30

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. ²³ Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" ²⁴ "I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when

the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land.²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy^b in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff.³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Jesus worshiped regularly and so fulfilled the commandments in this regard. Jesus probably read from Isaiah in Hebrew, and then he or someone else paraphrased it in Aramaic, one of the other common languages of the day (v. 16).

The books of the OT were written on scrolls, kept in a special place in the synagogue and handed to the reader by a special attendant. The passage Jesus read about the Messiah (Isa 61:1–2) may have been one he chose to read, or it may have been the assigned passage for the day. This verse tells of the Messiah’s (His) ministry of preaching and healing—to meet every human need (vv. 17-19).

It was customary to stand while reading Scripture (v. 16) but to sit while teaching (v. 20) Rabbis commonly taught on the Scripture passages just read from the lectionary, like sermons today.

Their question could be understood as favorable: “isn’t it amazing that a son of Joseph can teach like this?” But it could also be understood negatively, and that appears to be the direction in which their thoughts turned. “From where does he get this authority?” “Can an unschooled son of a carpenter be a rabbi, much less the Messiah?” Jesus did not conform to their expectations, leaving them perplexed and confused. They kind say “this is great, BUT” (v. 22).

Jesus’ words outraged his audience because He was basically saying He was the Messiah (v. 21) Later He made a case for including Gentiles in the Messiah’s salvation (vv. 24-27).

Their fury led them to take the drastic action of throwing Him off a cliff. In addition to the violence of the fall, the people might have also planned to stone Jesus (v. 29).

By “walking right through the crowd” Jesus was attesting to both Jesus’ power and God’s timing. Luke does not explain whether the escape was miraculous or simply the result of Jesus’ commanding presence. In any case, his time (to die) had not yet come (v. 30).