

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, January 24, 2010

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

### Benediction, anyone?

#### Year C

#### RCL

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

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

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

The reader will please excuse my verbiage related to my political campaign. I always try to think about the assigned scriptures in the light of what is happening IN my life at the time that I write. I try to “hear” what scripture is saying to me “at the moment” and “at the place” where I find myself. I recommend that YOU do the same. Hopefully, you will find the strength, the hope and the JOY to keep on going despite the odds’ being against you. What we cannot cure, we must endure. Life teaches us lessons that, hopefully, we only need learn once. Unfortunately, in regards to “life lessons”, I need frequent reminders of my humanity and spiritual frailty. People seldom KNOW anyone, even themselves, and try to “project” their feelings onto others. In psychiatry this is known as “transference” and is part of our psyche’s seeking to preserve “itself”. Each week I “stand naked” before the “mirror” of scripture and am humbled by what I read and learn. To those who feel like “self-made” people, I say “perhaps you should not have stopped ‘making’ so soon.” What “lessons” do we find in scripture this week? Let us press on with open hearts and minds and let the scriptures “speak” to us.

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

**All the people of Israel 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 worshiped 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."**

What do you know about Nehemiah? Nehemiah means "The Lord comforts", a fitting name for any king. Originally, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were ONE book (scroll) by tradition. In fact, early translations of the Septuagint call Ezra and Nehemiah, Ezra I and Ezra II. The two books describe the "return" of exiles from Persia to Palestine. They are very similar and contain many of the same "facts" about the issues and people of the time of the return. The passages preceding the ones cited describe the rebuilding of a "Temple" in Jerusalem, its contents and the restoration of the Levites to Temple maintenance. This passage occurs some thirteen years AFTER Ezra's return to Jerusalem. It was traditional for Persian kings to pay to restore "places of worship" within their "kingdoms" and the Temple was such an edifice. The "official" documents mandating this "restoration" are translated and contained in the two books. These events occurred on the first day of the "civil" year or governmental year. The "date" was October 8, 445 B.C. according to scholars who are paid to know such things. It was a celebration of the "Feast of Trumpets" much like our New Year's Day celebration in modern times. The people stood for five or six hours while the "scroll" was read. People today would not "stand" for a five or six hour reading of scripture. It is hard enough to get them to SIT for an hour. What the people heard was the "word of the Lord" and they were brought to tears when they realized their depravity and disobedience to God's precepts. That, "and all who could hear with understanding" is a most interesting aside. The priests obviously "interpreted" and expanded upon the Torah so that the people could understand the meaning of the scriptures. Many of those in the audience had probably "forgotten" their "native tongue" having been "born in Persia" during captivity. Once they had heard and worshipped, the "leaders" gave their "benediction" to the people: ***"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."*** This "benediction" (means, "to speak blessing") is a message of hope and grace to the people. It basically says "Now, go live your lives, help each other to survive and remember on each first day of the seventh month each year that the Lord is with you and will protect you." That is a good benediction

even today. We are bidden to the Lord's Table by the benediction of: "eat, drink AND remember".

**Psalm 19 Page 606-607, BCP**

*Caeli enarrant = "the heavens declare"*

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 judgments of the LORD are true  
and righteous altogether.***

10

***More to be desired are they than gold,***

3

*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.**

This is a personal “prayer” for “benediction”. Please read Paul’s use of this hierarchy of power and glory in Romans 10:18-21. If you have attended many churches, you probably have heard the “benediction” contained in Psalm 19:14: **“Let the words of MY mouth and the meditation of MY heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, MY strength and MY redeemer.”** In my opinion, every “worship service” should end with a proclamation of benediction so as to say “Now, go and do likewise. Take the good news and spread it around in your daily lives to the glory of our Father. You are loved by the King of Heaven. Go, ‘show and tell’ everyone that they, too, are loved by their Creator.”

### **1 Corinthians 12:12-31a**

***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 honorable we clothe with greater honor, 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 honor 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 honored, 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.**

In my opinion, this scripture should have been cited last week as it ties better with the beginning of the chapter from which it hails. But, knowing most of us, we might not have read the entirety of the passages if they had been required last week. As discussed, any "gift" is not for the purpose of personal aggrandizement so that one can "boast" about their being greater than any other. Paul uses the analogy of the "human organism" as a metaphor for the many "members" of "one BODY". It speaks to the issue of inclusiveness and many disparate parts making a living organism which is the "body of Christ". Being "equal members of the same body", no one is greater or lesser than another despite their "airs of importance". "Church leaders" would do well to remember this when "ruling" on church issues. The preacher is no more important to the life of the church than the person who cleans the toilets in the building. The Elder is no more important than the person who passes out bulletins or sets up the building for worship. The "leaders" have been given special skills that enable them to lead with understanding so that all are welcomed to do their special ministry and to contribute to the life of the church. It is the classic example of "being obedient by serving each other" and a fulfillment of the "benediction" we have received. "Church" happens all week. We gather together at special times to worship our Lord but that is NOT CHURCH. It is a small but important part of the life of a church. Ministry is what ALL must do to be part of the Body of Christ that is the church. Incidentally, the "church" is the BODY OF BELIEVERS and may meet in many different places and have different forms of "worship". Some "churches" (composed of many 'members of the BODY') may concentrate their efforts on ministry to children, ministries to elderly, ministries to prisons, or whatever suits their "style" and "calling" so, I see many "churches" as MEMBERS OF THE SAME BODY with different yet important "functions". A "benediction" is our means of empowerment to do what is needed to sustain "the body" and to overcome the adversity that happens "between worship services."

## **Luke 4:14-21**

***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 favor."***

***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."***

This scripture stands as a warning to those who wish popularity based on public opinion. IF these people in the synagogue could see Jesus as worthy of praise and a "fulfillment of prophecy" and soon after, very soon after, crucify Him, then public opinion is not worth a bucket of warm spit. Being an "observant Jew", Jesus frequented the synagogue on the Sabbath day where he engaged the attendees in a reading from Isaiah AT THEIR REQUEST. THEY were able to see that Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecy that he read from Isaiah's book. What happened? One day Jesus was praised and soon after was crucified? Was Jesus arrogant in saying ***"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"***? Was the issue that Jesus "seemed" to set himself above the "leaders of the synagogue"? Opinions can get you killed whether "true" or "false". Truth is not always appreciated by people who think THEY know the TRUTH. Did a "difference of OPINION" lead to the crucifixion of Jesus? They had the "instrument of their deliverance and salvation" standing in their midst and did not appreciate his divinity or his offer of salvation? Have you and I acted in similar manners? Have we "seen" the truth of the salvation offered by Jesus and gotten angry? Had Jesus ended his recorded remarks with "Just kidding", do you think the people would have been okay with his readings? Is it "arrogance" to tell the truth and state the "facts" as we know them? Again, it is the ATTITUDE of the one stating the opinion and the ATTITUDE of the ones hearing the opinion that lead to the results that often split churches and separate people from each other. Jesus told the TRUTHS as He KNEW THEM. Our opinions are often self-serving and lack true objectivity. "I once took the prize for being the best-looking boy in Temple High School...but, they caught me and made me put it back." Humor is often the twisting of truth into irony and sarcasm to make people smile. Anyone, in a church or in the public eye, who falsely

“augments” the truth for popularity or personal gain, is justly open to criticism and ridicule. President “Give ‘em hell, Harry” Truman said: “I’m going to tell them the truth and they will think it’s hell.” What each of us has left at the end of life is nothing more than our reputation. It is ironic that the turnout at our funerals is mostly determined by the weather. Unless we are God and KNOW the truth, our only response to questions should be “I don’t know everything about that but, at the present time with what I know, my opinion is...” It’s that “integrity” thing, again. Popularity is fleeting and will not “save” us. Riches are evanescent and cannot “save” us. The only “lasting legacy” that I strive to attain is “faithful, obedient SERVANT who pleased my Father who is in Heaven.” All else is vanity and a waste of time and emotion. The benediction of the ages: **“May the words of my mouth and the meditations (attitude) of my heart be acceptable to my Father, my ROCK and MY REDEEMER.”** Amen.