



The readings this week offer a range of options for themes. There is the word of God, revealed in creation and through the book of the law. There is the mission of Christ proclaimed in his reading of the scroll from Isaiah. And there is the call for us to be the body of Christ, working together with each part taking his or her place. All of these ideas come together in the theme of purpose and call. We are all recipients of God's calling word, and we are all called to participate in Christ's mission. To do this work, we need to collaborate and each take our place in the body.

May our worship this week reignite our sense of call, and teach us to find our place in God's called community.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

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

Lives can be changed by reading the Scriptures. So it was when Jesus read from Isaiah in the synagogue, and so it was in the 5th century BC when the holy books, once lost, were read aloud by Ezra to the Israelites returned from exile.

Psalm 19

A celebration of God's word, proclaimed and revealed in creation, which makes naive people wise, which gladdens the heart, which gives light to see by, and which is a valuable treasure.

1 Corinthians 12 : 12-31a

This reading continues the letter from last Sunday. Paul has said the gifts of the 'spirit are many and various, and now he shows that these do not divide us but unite us in the body of Christ on earth, all members together.

Luke 4 : 14-21

When Jesus read from Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue, he proclaimed that he was himself the expected anointed one, bringer of good news of freedom and healing.

TEXT OF READINGS

[http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Nehemiah%208:1-3,%205-6,%208-10%0Acw%20Psalm%2019%0A1%20Corinthians%2012:%2012-31a%0ALuke%204:%2014-21%20\[22-30\]](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Nehemiah%208:1-3,%205-6,%208-10%0Acw%20Psalm%2019%0A1%20Corinthians%2012:%2012-31a%0ALuke%204:%2014-21%20[22-30])

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COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

Almighty and everlasting God,
Mercifully look upon our infirmities,
and in all our dangers and necessities
stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
Renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

Heavenly Father, when we are overwhelmed and mournful, remind us of your joy for us,
and fill us with your strength.
Let us walk: **In the light of the Lord.**

Holy Spirit, give us ears to hear the Lord through the beauty of the sky, the history of your
presence in all times, and in the commandments given for our own good.
Let us walk: **In the light of the Lord.**

Lord Jesus Christ, help us give thanks for every gift you've given to us, and may we use
our special gifts for your glory.
Let us walk: **In the light of the Lord.**

Lord Jesus, bringer of good news to all of us who are poor in faith, open our eyes, our ears
and our hearts to receive your message of joy.
Let us walk: **In the light of the Lord.**

When we struggle with the world's wayward directions, with politics held higher than truth,
give us a spirit of discernment, Holy Spirit, that we may keep our focus on you.
Let us walk: **In the light of the Lord.**

We bring before you all who are weary with bodies worn from age and disease. Be the
healer, the comforter, and the hope for those whom we name before you _____.
Let us walk: **In the light of the Lord.**

Light of the world, shine brightly.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

A: As we offer our petitions before God, let us hunger and thirst for righteousness,
saying, "In faith we pray," and respond, "Lord hear us."

A: For the poor and the poor in spirit that they might know what it means to be

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filled. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

A: For Prime Minister _____ and the leaders of this country, _____, that they might serve with humility and meekness. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

A: For those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, especially prisoners of conscience in _____, that they might be freed. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

A: For those who make peace in our parish, that they might rejoice in their work. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

A: For those preparing for confirmation, that their commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ might not waver, even as people revile them, persecute them, and utter all kinds of evil against them falsely. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

A: For those who mourn the loss of family or friends, that they might discover Christ's gentle presence in their midst. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

P: God of Mercy, you cause your children to hunger for righteousness. Help us to enact our prayers as we leave this place of worship. For the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

POST COMMUNION

Almighty Father,
your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world.
May your people,
illuminated by your word and sacraments,
shine with the radiance of his glory,
that he may be known, worshipped,
and obeyed to the ends of the earth;
for he is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

PRAYERS

Perfect Light of revelation,
as you shone in the life of Jesus,
whose epiphany we celebrate,
so shine in us and through us,
that we may become beacons of truth and compassion,
enlightening all creation with deeds of justice and mercy. Amen.

O God,
you spoke your word
and revealed your good news in Jesus, the Christ.
Fill all creation with that word again,
so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations
and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples,
we may become one living body,
your incarnate presence on the earth. Amen.

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To God who welcomes all in love,
let us pray for the good of the church
and the concerns of those in need.
God of every land and nation,
you have created all people
and you dwell among us in Jesus Christ.
Listen to the cries of those who pray to you,
and grant that, as we proclaim the greatness of your name,
all people will know the power of love at work in the world.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sisters and brothers,
let us lift our hearts in faith
to the one who hears all prayers
and holds close all those in need.
Holy God, you gather the whole universe
into your radiant presence
and continually reveal your Son as our Saviour.
Bring healing to all wounds,
make whole all that is broken,
speak truth to all illusion,
and shed light in every darkness,
that all creation will see your glory and know your Christ. Amen.

In you, O Lord our God,
we find our joy,
for through your law and your prophets
you formed a people in mercy and freedom,
in justice and righteousness.
Pour your Spirit on us today,
that we who are Christ's body
may bear the good news of your ancient promises
to all who seek you. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

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

- "So they read the book . . . with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." How have traditions of faith developed that try to take everything in the scriptures as literal truth? Here we have a community of faith gathering to hear the word read, and interpreted, to convey the meaning of sometimes confusing laws and scriptures. To be sure, different interpretations would arise, but it that more threatening than the kind of control that results when we try to contain and box in the living word of God?
- "For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law." Nehemiah finds a people returning from exile, returning to a land that for them was completely tied up with their understanding of and relationship with God. It's hard for us to even comprehend crying in joy because we're finally able to hear the words of Scripture again - what would it mean if these words of God simply brought us joy and life? The Living Word of God? How can we read the scriptures with fresh eyes, and listen with open ears, as if we've been away for SO long from God's word?

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Psalm 19:

- "The heavens are telling the glory of God." These famous words from the Psalm are often set to music. Everything in creation announces God's handiwork.
- This imagery of the sun "like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy", this personification of the sun draws to my mind Greek/Roman mythology, and no doubt made contemporaries of the psalmist think of similar images of sun-gods in other religions. The difference? Here the sun is put into place by God, not a god in itself.
- God is more than gold, sweeter than honey. A simple message - but reminds us of things we put too often before God in our lives.
- "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations..." This verse is often used by pastors before they begin preaching. I like it, but if there's a way to use a Bible verse too much to the point of over doing, this one makes it on my personal list!

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a:

- This passage, and the preceding week's passage from Corinthians, are great passages for congregations. No matter how many times we say that everyone has a ministry, a call to follow from God, it seems our congregants don't really believe that God means *them*. We will be using these two weeks to do a spiritual gifts inventory in our congregation, or at least spring off from these two weeks of texts. How can we get people to believe that God has blessed, gifted, and called *them*?
- This passage is similar in content to the first part of this chapter, but it is much more visually stimulating. One can just picture a big body that was all nose or all feet, very cartoonish. It's easy to see the ridiculousness of such a proposal. That's how ridiculous it is, Paul teaches, to think that we can get along without one another, or that one's role is more or less important than another's role. Great opportunities for fun children's messages here as well.
- This is also a great Sunday to celebrate Holy Communion if possible. The sense of body and being the body of Christ is made very real, and makes sense in the communion liturgy of Christ's body for us.
- The hymn "Many Gifts, One Spirit" is perfect for this occasion, and will bring the message home. It is in the United Methodist Hymnal. Some lyrics: "In our difference is blessing, from diversity we praise One Giver, One Lord, One Spirit, One Word, known in many ways, hallowing our days. For the giver, for the gifts, praise, praise, praise!"

Luke 4:14-21:

- This event is lifted out as special and unique, but it is important to note that verse 16b tells us that Jesus visiting the synagogue on the Sabbath was his custom, his regular practice. This is probably not the first time he had read scripture, either. What makes it important is that after reading these words from Isaiah, Jesus says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." That means Jesus is telling them that *he* is the one appointed to proclaim release, recovery, and the year of the Lord's favor. How would the people have reacted?
- I love this passage from Isaiah, particularly read by Jesus, because to me it sums up his purpose. His goal was not to decide which people should go to heaven or hell, or to figure out who was 'saved' or not, or who believed that he was God's only Son, and the only Way. He was sent to proclaim justice and freedom for the oppressed! He was sent to proclaim God's *favour!* That is GOOD NEWS indeed, not hell-fire and brimstone we try to make into good news.
- In terms of timeline, note that this event takes place just after Jesus' temptation in the desert, which takes place just after his baptism. He has been prepared -

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recognized as beloved and chosen by God, has stood up to temptation, and now he is declaring himself, presenting himself in the faith community and saying, "Here I am - this is my task and I'm going to get to it now."

LECTIONARY NOTES

2

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

In a world that can sometimes seem so random, this week in Epiphany gives us a vision of purpose. God's purpose – God's message – was read from the book of the law by Ezra to God's people. It is proclaimed, as the Psalmist declares, through all of creation. And it was the guiding force in Jesus' life and ministry. As he began his work, he proclaimed as his mandate the words of Isaiah's prophecy – God's saving and liberating "Jubilee" purpose. Now, as those who follow Christ, we are called, individually and together, to fulfil Christ's purpose, in our world and in our time. To do this, God has gifted each of us, and called us to work together as one Body, as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12. Hearing God's word, allowing it to call and direct us, and working together as a body, a called community – these are the elements of this week's theme.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: The idea of having a sense of purpose – of calling – is one with a chequered history in the global community. Too many corrupt and tyrannical leaders have become so because they felt that they were somehow given a special purpose by God, and that God was on their side, and against their enemies. The time for this kind of "destiny" talk is over. However, the purpose of Christ, revealed in the Isaiah prophecy, is one in which God calls us all to participate. This liberating, compassionate, transforming vision is one that impacts everything we do, and is one to which we can hold our leaders accountable. As we face global economic, climatological and other challenges, let's allow a renewed vision of Christ, and of Christ's purpose, to guide our social conscience and activism. Let's not allow the magnitude of the struggles we face, or the fatigue that we so often feel as we work for justice, to dull our sense of call. Let's not allow the "spirit of the age" to make us deaf to the wisdom and revelation in God's word, and let's not forget that we are all – as individuals and as organisations – connected to each other, and we need each other if we are to address the crises of our time and begin to realise something of Jesus' liberating dream in our world.

LOCAL APPLICATION: In every community are those who need liberation – the poor who need good news; the physically, psychologically or spiritually blind who need sight; the prisoners who need to be freed. Who are these people in your church and in your community? The purpose of Christ is both an invitation to life for all the broken and lost ones (including us), but also a challenge to participate in the work of liberation for those who choose to follow Jesus. This means that each of us needs to find and fulfil our place and purpose in the Body of Christ, as we work together toward Jesus' dream of a liberated world. It also means that we need to cling to God's word and allow it to challenge our injustice and direct our quest to bring life and wholeness to those around us. How can you work within your world to commit to Christ's purpose so that, to those among you, you may also say (collectively) "today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"?

Girardian - exegetical notes from various writes on each of the readings

http://girardianlectionary.net/year_c/epiphany3c.htm

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SERMON OUTLINE

Luke 4:14-21 Jesus returned to Galilee

follows on from the Temptations - as Jesus *returned to Galilee* - populous area..

Josephus:-204 towns with not less than 15000 = over 3 million people! in fertile land - vine, fig, olive, oak, walnut, palm, terebinth, cedar, cypress, balsam, fir, pine, bay, sycamore, myrtle, almond, pomegranate, citron, oleander... a busy thriving area – ideal place to evangelise!

1. The Attraction of the Teacher: *a report about him spread through all the surrounding country... excitement!*

Josephus: *They were ever fond of innovations & by nature disposed to changes, & delighted in seditions. They were ever ready to follow a leader who would begin an insurrection. They were quick in temper & given to quarrelling.*

2. The Attendance of the Lord: *as was his custom to attend divine worship - is it ours today?? 3 key parts to synagogues worship - a) opening prayer; b) reading of scripture; c) teaching & discussion - led by invited teacher...>> core of our worship services today!*

3. The Attention of the people: Jesus was invited by the **Chazzan**/attendant to read the scripture - from **Isaiah 61**:- *The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has appointed me to preach the good news - messianic association - to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (19). The people were fascinated by this new teacher - the eyes of everyone were fastened on him. Then came the punchline:- Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. The Messiah is here! Listen to him! Believe in him! All spoke well of him & were amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. None other than God's Son.*

By Norman Porteous

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

["Jesus' Mission Statement,"](#) Rev. Charles Hoffacker, *Sermons that Work*, Episcopal Digital Network, 2013.

<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/01/05/3-epiphany-c-2013/>

["Everything Depends on Remembering,"](#) - Nehemiah - the Rev. David Jones, *Day 1*

http://day1.org/1710-everything_depends_on_remembering

["Gospel Living Made Simple,"](#) The Rev. Charles Morris, *Day 1*

http://day1.org/4527-gospel_living_made_simple

["The Body of Christ,"](#) Frederick Buechner.

<http://frederickbuechner.com/content/weekly-sermon-illustration-body-christ>

["Everything Depends on Remembering,"](#) - Nehemiah - the Rev. David Jones, *Day 1*,

http://day1.org/1710-everything_depends_on_remembering

CHILDREN

[Worshiping with Children](#), Epiphany 3C, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown

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<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/year-c-3rd-sunday-after-epiphany-3rd.html>

["The Body of Christ,"](#) Dianne Deming, *Children's Sermons Today*

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/year-c-3rd-sunday-after-epiphany-3rd.html>

["A Feast of Word and Words,"](#) Sharron R. Blezard, *Stewardship of Life*,

<http://www.stewardshipoflife.org/2013/01/a-feast-of-word-and-words/>

[Little People, Big Word](#), D. Ditmer

<http://littlepeoplebigword.com/2013/01/21/epiphany-3c-2/>

["The Eyes of All,"](#) On the Chancel Steps, children's resources by Frances Woodruff

<https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2013/01/13/eyes/>

[Children's Sermon](#), *Faith Formation Journeys*

faithformationjourneys.org/?p=616

["Sermon of the Week,"](#) Sermons 4 Kids

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

[Jesus, Joy Of Our Desiring](#)

[Now Thank We All Our God](#)

[Christ Whose Glory Fills The Sky](#)

[All Ears \(New Hymn.com\)](#)

[Jubilee](#)

[Beautiful News](#)

[You Do All Things Well](#)

[Take It To The Streets](#)

[God Of Justice](#)

[I Will Follow Him \(Sister Act\)](#)

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