

**Bible Study**  
**Epiphany 3, Year C**  
**January 24, 2016**

[RCL] **Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21**

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

*All the people gathered together in the square before the Water Gate. (Nehemiah 8:1)*

In the Nehemiah reading, we hear about a joyful and united community of Israel that has gathered together to hear the Torah. After years of separation during the Babylonian Exile, Israel is one community again. The Nehemiah reading is a celebratory passage, which fits well with the season of Epiphany. Israel has rebuilt the Temple and rebuilt its community. But, before we cheer on Israel too much, it is important to acknowledge the hard side of this new community. Generally, it was just the Israelite elite that had been exiled to Babylon. Many other Israelites stayed behind in Jerusalem. While separated, some of the men who stayed in Jerusalem married women who were not Israelites. Upon reunification, the women and children who were not Israelites were exiled from Jerusalem. In addition, Israel constructed a huge wall around Jerusalem to keep all “outsiders” out of their community. So, Nehemiah forces us to question the cost of community and our willingness to accept the “other” in our community. It is particularly relevant today as the United States questions its openness to refugees and to people of other faiths.

- In a time when exiles and refugees are very much a part of our daily life, how can we be community and be truly inclusive?
- How can we broaden our idea of the “other”?

**Psalm 19**

*Let the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. (Psalm 19: 14)*

This is the psalm that many people pray before delivering a sermon. Before standing before their community, they pray to God for guidance. It is another example of the way that this week’s readings call us to be community. This psalm also talks about being “acceptable in your sight.” In the Gospel, we hear about Jesus being seen by his congregation. As we come out of the darkest time of the year in the North Hemisphere, there is more light and a better ability to see others and for God to see us.

- How are we living in God’s sight?
- What does it mean for our word and mediation to be acceptable in God’s sight?
- What obligation does this place on our discipleship?

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

In the Corinthians reading, Paul provides further support for Jesus’ message of radical inclusion. We all have a part to play in the body of God. Some of those parts are perceived to be more valuable than others but the whole body could not function without all of the parts. So, we need to be sure to embrace the embarrassing and weak parts, as well as the attractive and smart parts. In Nehemiah, we know that the community was not accepting of all the parts, and Paul saw exclusivity that was continuing in the early Christian community. Paul called all to gather as one community in Christ. In addition, Paul’s description of the Church as one body has some nice

parallels with the season of Epiphany, when we come together as a community and celebrate that God has come to us in a human body in Jesus. The incarnation provides another reason to honor all parts of our bodies.

- Who are the parts of the body of Christ that we neglect or ignore?
- How are we treating those parts that we call “refugee,” “exile,” or “Muslim”?
- How do we learn to embrace those parts of the body that do not meet our expectations: our disabilities, our limitations, and our weaknesses?

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

***The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. (Luke 4:20)***

The Gospel brings together the themes from Nehemiah and Corinthians. As Jesus stood before his community, they finally saw him for who he was. He brought together his community in the same way that the Torah did in Nehemiah, symbolizing the new Covenant with God. This carpenter’s son, who was not a celebrated part of his community, is now the hope and Messiah for this community. As Jesus’ community sees Jesus, they are learning to see a member of their community in a new way and in a new role. They are recognizing a part of their body in a new way. In the season of Epiphany, we are called to see in a new way, to embrace the body in a new way.

- How can we take the Christmas light to see anew?
- Who can we view differently?
- What can we view differently in ourselves or in others?
- How can our new vision help us follow Jesus more fully?

*Written by Brendan Barnicle*

*Brendan Barnicle is a Postulate for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Oregon and in his second year in the low residency Masters of Divinity program at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. He is also a Managing Director for Capital Markets Research at an investment bank, where his research focuses on enterprise software and Software-as-a-Service.*

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