

Pastor Roy's Sermon from January 27, 2013

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

God speaks through Nehemiah, through Paul, and through Jesus who quotes Isaiah. From the time humans have thought about a merciful creator God, we have sought God and God has spoken to us.

In Israel and around the world, there has been a Spirit led conversation among sisters and brothers who learn and grow together. This is what the revelation of God is. God has spoken in ages past. God speaks today. So, not only does God speak through “the preacher,” but also through the conversations in Sunday School and beyond. The word of God in today's passages is delivered to the community gathered for learning and worship.

The basic message of the God through the years is that God's Spirit helps those who welcome God's work and ways. God's work is to bring good news to the poor, release to captives, sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. God's work is to proclaim God's favor by our actions, and sometimes, when necessary, with words.

If we're honest, we often think of God's kingdom as an **effort of personal goodness to earn God's favor.** The consistent message throughout the Scriptures and the history of the Church is we're not called to store up God's favor for ourselves but to spread it around freely.

We are called to love by showing mercy. As we saw last week in God's gift of a superabundance of really good wine at the wedding of Cana, God is lavish and even wasteful in granting us mercy and love.

When we live that way, it does not drain us but fills us our own God given source of superabundant love. Loving others does not tire us out, but fills us with even more love and energy to reach out in compassion. Kindness begets kindness even as greed and ill will beget more of the same. Listen to the word which came to Ezra and Nehemiah.

They proclaimed the law of God to a listening people who hadn't heard the law ever before. The people became upset because they had not been practicing the law. **They were afraid, because that's our nature to think it's about earning God's affection.** But Ezra and Nehemiah insisted that the day was a day for celebrating and that the joy of God's ways would make them strong.

For Paul it's all about joy too. Joy flows from the gifts of the Spirit. The gifts flow to those who do Jesus' works and show his mercy. Jesus reads from Isaiah, “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...” “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

In our lives, do we sense the flow of God's Spirit? It's definitely there. Sometimes we miss it because we're distracted and lost. Do we sense God's creative pleasure and blessing with who we are? Jesus quoting Isaiah speaks the good news that God loves us. If we have been led to believe otherwise, then we need to hear God's message of release, recovery, healing, and freedom. Once we open ourselves to the truth of this message, not only will we be freed but the Spirit then leads us to bring hope and healing to those around us.

What does it mean to be healed? What does it mean to be released from bondage? To be set free? Destructive habits, impulses, and addictions can drive us to despair. Friendships can restore freedom as we listen to the Spirit speak to us through one another. **The Spirit can speak in surprising ways through surprising people. We do best when we are interdependent. Friendship is fellowship, but it takes time and effort. Well worth the time and faith it takes.**

Love is eternal. Faithfulness is eternal. Compassion is eternal. Greed is temporary. Fear is temporary. Neglect is temporary. Unity and communion are eternal; we share the same history and have the same future. God is working in the middle of this all. The Spirit is at work if we listen and trust.

God is leading us into peace together in faith here, as we practice the gifts of the Spirit and grow the fruit of the Spirit. **In Epiphany, the light of Christ shines forth in love that we may have the Spirit of the Lord upon us—to anoint us to bring good news to the poor, 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. Jesus' words are fulfilled today in your midst.**

May we have eyes to see them revealed in each moment. Thanks be to God! Take note! God is at work!