



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

January 24, 2010
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Nathan Wilson

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

LM: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 15; 1 Corinthians
12:12-30 or 12:12-14, 27; Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

While it may be hard to believe, I don't seem to remember all the words preached during my junior high years. I did regularly attend church, and I was paying attention. Of course, I may have been paying a little more attention to who else was there, especially in my age range, than to the sermon. But I do recall that between the reading of Scripture and the start of the sermon, my minister would pray the concluding verse of today's psalm: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

Those familiar words of appeal became one of my favorite parts of the worship service. Even if I listened to nothing further, that short prayer helped clarify for me the point of church, and perhaps the point of living in service to God. They remain a favorite verse and desire. The psalmist announces that nature reveals God's glory and the Torah describes God's will. Nature provides for God's splendor and movement. The Torah renews the soul, instructs the ignorant, brings joy to the heart, enlightens the eye, and guides God's servant.

Nehemiah describes Ezra reading the Torah and the people's response. As they hear the text explained, the people begin weeping, but Nehemiah and Ezra reassure them that the day is a holy one for celebration, not for weeping. "For the joy of the Lord," reads verse 10, "is your strength."

While the text from 1 Corinthians does not immediately focus on God's Word, it does depict a community that the Word has formed as it grapples with diversity. Given what we know about their flare for spiritual flamboyance, the Corinthians probably want the flashier gifts Paul lists last. But the Apostle calls them to hard work and real service, concluding with the promise to show them a "still more excellent way" (v. 31b).

Our text from Luke begins with Jesus filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, that same powerful presence we saw at his baptism in the Jordan and with the Samaritans in the gospel and second reading from Acts two Sundays ago. This Spirit's extraordinary



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power is manifest in service to those in need. It is not the power of wealth or social standing or government authority; rather, it is the power of the servant, shared with those least likely to wield power in the conventional sense.

Endowed with this Spirit and back in his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus sets the stage for his ministry with a homily that begins with a reading from the prophet Isaiah. By doing so, he summarizes his own mission and associates himself with important social themes. As the Messiah, Jesus will release victims, restore people to wholeness, and transform societies. In today's vernacular, these are his "goals."

Unfortunately, his audience's initial enthusiasm subsides when they realize that the hometown bunch won't receive preferential treatment from their authoritative resident. Jesus announces that his ministry is for all people, Jew and Gentile, particularly the marginalized but also the mainstream. So his own people reject him for these words, angrily threatening hostility and violence. For us, as people with particular passions for justice, it is important that we don't read into this text (or others) more than is there. In quoting from Isaiah, Jesus names particular concerns that will characterize his ministry. And as his followers, we too are called to release, restore, and transform. We are to confront injustice and minister to those who are oppressed. And yes, some will praise us and others will hate us for that.

In naming some groups, though, it is a mistake to think Jesus indicated a lack of concern for other, more "fortunate" groups. Jesus accepts people from all backgrounds among his disciples. He dines with the rich. But when he does, he challenges them both to share their wealth and to alter the status quo for the benefit of those in need. He invites us all to become advocates for justice.

Children's Time [Marc Miller]

Ask the children what they would do if they were God. You will get some silly answers, but you will also witness the incredible spiritual wisdom residing in our youth. Pointing to today's gospel text, show them what Jesus—God incarnate—chose to do: he fed all the people who were hungry; he healed all the people who were sick; and he gave his life, so that everyone can live with God forever. That's what God would—and did—do.

Musical Suggestions [Larry Hollar]

Hail to the Lord's Anointed—*The United Methodist Hymnal* 203

You Have Anointed Me—*Gather Comprehensive* 676



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I Am the Light of the World—*Chalice Hymnal* 469

Praise with Joy the World's Creator—*The New Century Hymnal* 273

O God in Whom All Life Begins— *The New Century Hymnal* 401

The Carpenter— *Gather Comprehensive* 483

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