

Lessons for Third Sunday after Epiphany

January 24, 2016

Nehemiah 8:1–3, 5–6, 8–10 ~ *The exiles returning from Babylon committed themselves to God's Law.*

Psalm 19 (*Antiphon: v. 14*)

1 Corinthians 12:12–31a ~ *Each part of the body of Christ is committed to the whole for the good of all.*

Luke 4:16–30 ~ *Jesus endorsed the messianic agenda announced by Isaiah and claimed it as His own.*

GATHERING THE TEXTS: The Mender of Broken Hearts

When Ezra read the Book of the Law and explained it to the people at the newly rebuilt wall of Jerusalem, they rejoiced because it ushered in a new day of God's grace. Jesus identified Isaiah's message of God's good news and favor for the poor and brokenhearted as the description of His life's work. He is the One who secured release for those imprisoned by the power of sin and crushed by the despair of death. Joined to Christ by the power of the Spirit in baptism, we who have had our broken hearts healed have become priests of the Lord and servants of our God to help bear the burdens of those who suffer.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE: O Spirit of the Living God, you have joined me to the body of Christ that I may feel the pain of my sisters and brothers in the faith and so ease their burdens. Help me share my joys so we may all rejoice together. Grant that all may know release from sin's captivating power through Christ our Savior. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT: God has called all those who are members of Christ's body to be enlisted in the Messiah's agenda of bringing good news to the oppressed. All of our energy and resources are tapped for this task by virtue of our place in the body of believers.

OFFERING PRAYER: So many tasks, Lord, to be done,
It takes the work of everyone.
So many gifts, Lord, You will use
Each one of them the way You choose. Amen.

CONVICTION AND COMFORT: When Jesus claimed the messianic mission of Isaiah as His own, His Nazareth neighbors reacted as they might have in their childhood when someone wouldn't play the game their way! When we don't respond to the needs of all believers in the body of Christ – and the sufferings of those whom Christ wants to include in His body – we are essentially taking ourselves out of the game – and out of the body – and heading home! Except that home is where the body is and where the members work together for the common good. Only by God's grace are we able to commit ourselves and all our resources to God's will, as the returned exiles did in Jerusalem when they heard the Law of Moses read.