

**Third Sunday after Epiphany**

**January 23, 2022**



### **Introduction**

*God's glory is revealed in the reading of scripture. People stand at attention. People weep. People prostrate themselves in prayer. The unity of the church is another reflection of God's glory. Most gloriously, the promises of God are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Gather round. Listen up. Glimpse the glory of God.*

### **Confession and Forgiveness**

In the name of the Father, and of the ✙ Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people,  
turning us from our sin to live for you alone.

Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin,  
receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness  
of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Most merciful God,

**we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.**

**We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done and by what we have left undone.**

**We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.**

**For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.**

**Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,  
so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.**

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin,  
and made us alive together with Christ. By grace we have been saved.

In the name of ✙ Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.

Almighty God strengthen us with power through the Holy Spirit,  
that Christ may live in our hearts through faith. **Amen.**

**Opening Hymn ELW # 886 / LBW # 559 *Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing***

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

## Prayer of the Day

Blessed Lord God, you have caused the holy scriptures to be written for the nourishment of your people. Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, comforted by your promises, we may embrace and forever hold fast to the hope of eternal life, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## First Reading: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

*The exiles have returned and rebuilt Jerusalem. Now Ezra, the priest, reads the law of Moses to them in the public square. When they hear it, they weep for their sins and for the long years in exile, but Ezra reminds them that “the joy of the LORD is your strength.”*

*Read the complete text [here](#).*

## Psalm: Psalm 19

<sup>1</sup>The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims its maker’s handiwork.

<sup>2</sup>**One day tells its tale to another, and one night imparts knowledge to another.**

<sup>3</sup>Although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard,

<sup>4</sup>**their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message  
to the ends of the world, where God has pitched a tent for the sun.**

<sup>5</sup>It comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber;  
it rejoices like a champion to run its course.

<sup>6</sup>**It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens and runs about  
to the end of it again; nothing is hidden from its burning heat.**

<sup>7</sup>The teaching of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure and gives wisdom to the simple.

<sup>8</sup>**The statutes of the LORD are just and rejoice the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is clear and gives light to the eyes.**

<sup>9</sup>The fear of the LORD is clean and endures forever;  
the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

<sup>10</sup>**More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,  
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.**

<sup>11</sup>By them also is your servant enlightened, and in keeping them there is great reward.

<sup>12</sup>**Who can detect one’s own offenses? Cleanse me from my secret faults.**

<sup>13</sup>Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me; then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.

<sup>14</sup>**Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.**

## **Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a**

*The apostle and pastor Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to describe how intimately connected we are in the church. For this struggling congregation in Corinth, Paul delivers a vital message of unity that is a mark of the church today.*

*Read the complete text [here](#).*

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

*Near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, he visits his hometown of Nazareth. In the words of Isaiah, he states and claims his identity, purpose, and mission.*

*Read the complete text [here](#).*

## **Reflection on the Text**

I read an article this week about living in uncertain, in-between times. And to be honest, I have read several articles and books on this subject during these nearly two years of pandemic. One of them, by church leadership consultant Susan Beaumont, was titled **How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You Are Going**.

That's the problem, you see – it is hard for any of us to know what to do when we don't know where we are headed. Becca Ehrlich wrote this in her article, after describing a time when she simply did not know what to do next:

*“These in-between times are a real part of our lives. Scholars have named this in-between time liminal space: a place of transition, waiting, and uncertainty...*

*We are living in the liminal space between what life was like before the pandemic and what life will be like afterward. We have no idea what the future will look like once this pandemic is over, both in our own lives and in our local and global communities. It is an uncomfortable and painful place to be.*

*We know from stories in the Bible that living in liminal space is nothing new. It's been happening to humans for millennia.”*

We read about times like that in our texts for today. The people of God had just returned from exile in today's passage from Nehemiah. They were home again, in a land they probably no longer even recognized, and they truly did not know what to do next. So they wisely took time to listen to God's word.

Ezra, the scribe, stood before them and read from scripture for hours on end. Then there were prayers of praise and interpretation of the scripture, or what we would call preaching, before Nehemiah, the governor of the people, sent them on their way to celebrate the Sabbath – God's holy day – trusting that the joy of the Lord would be their strength.

The situation in the gospel text for today is similar, yet quite different. The people of Israel have been waiting for a very long time for the Messiah to come and save them. It had been over 400 years since they returned from exile and lived under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra.

With the wisdom of hindsight, we know that Jesus was – and is – the Messiah. But the people of his hometown of Nazareth certainly did not know that yet. As Jesus took his turn reading in worship that day, he picked a passage from Isaiah to make a bold declaration.

With that familiar passage about the work of the Spirit of the Lord, Jesus was announcing that he himself had been anointed to bring good news from God the Father. He was bringing healing and hope and freedom for all – especially those who needed it most.

Jesus was bringing an end to the liminal, uncertain, in-between time that the people had been living in for so very long. Jesus would bring God's kingdom near; bring God's will for the world to fruition. We read this passage with the knowledge of how Jesus' ministry of preaching and teaching and sharing God's love through miracles of healing AND showing God's love through his own death on a cross would unfold. We know that Jesus was raised again after his death. And we trust that he will bring us into eternal life, too.

And yet, we all STILL live life in uncertain, in-between times, don't we? Our lives – the entire human existence in the past two thousand years - have been in the already, but not yet.

Jesus has already come to earth to live and die for us. Jesus has already shown us the way that we are to live in love for one another. But we still live in a broken, sinful world, waiting for him to return again.

When Jesus returns, all of creation will be completely reconciled with God and everything will be restored according to God's plan. But for now, we still wait. For now, we live in liminal time.

In the meantime, we are called to gather to hear the word read and proclaimed. And then we are sent out, knowing that every day is holy; knowing that the joy of the Lord is our strength.

We have been shown the love of the Father, through the actions of the Son, and the presence of the Spirit. We are sent out to share the good news of God's love with our words and deeds so that others will see and hear and come to know God through our love.

We are called to remind others that the kingdom of God is present and active here and now, in spite of uncertain times. We are called to keep on taking the next step, even when we aren't sure what to do or where we are going. That, my friends, is living in faith. Amen.

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

## **Apostles' Creed**

*We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

## **Prayers of Intercession**

The Spirit of the Lord is poured out upon us in abundance; so we are bold to pray for the church, the world, and all that God has made.

*A brief silence.*

You reveal yourself to us in the reading of scripture. Fulfill your word through the faithful witness of your church. Send us out to bring your liberating good news to all people. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

All creation proclaims your handiwork. Teach us to love the intricate and beautiful bodies that you have created. Bless tiny insects, enormous whales, and every creature in between. Sustain species at risk of extinction. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

You desire that there be no dissension among us. Where we are divided in our society, nation, or world, come quickly to reunite us into one body. Ease conflict, dispel violence, and bring an end to war. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Anoint with your Spirit all who seek your favor. Grant provision and justice for people living in poverty, people living with disability, those living with pain, or those living under oppression especially those we name now. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Build up the body of Christ in this place. Bless the variety of ministries in this congregation. Empower us to freely welcome and deeply value each person who enters into worship and ministry among us. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

In thanksgiving we lift before you the saints for whom the promise of salvation has now been fulfilled. Tend to those who mourn. Bring us together in your everlasting glory. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Since we have such great hope in your promises, O God, we lift these and all of our prayers to you in confidence and faith; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

### **Lord's Prayer**

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

**Closing Hymn ELW # 551/ WOV # 723 *The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve***

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ruth Ann Sipe.

Susan Beaumont, **How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in a Liminal Season**, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019

Becca Ehrlich, "The Uncertainty of In-Between Time,"

<https://www.boldcafe.org/the-uncertainty-of-in-between-time/>, March 1, 2021