

Epiphany #3

1-23-2022

J.V. Trautwein, Pastor

Celebrate (Introduction)

“God’s glory revealed on the reading of scripture. People stood 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.”

We come together in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Hymn: [“Arise, Your Light Has Come”](#)

Psalmody: Psalm 19

“The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

²Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

³There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;

⁴yet their voice^a goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

⁶Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and there is nothing hid from its heat.

⁷The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;

the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;

⁸the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;

⁹the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;

the ordinances of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.

¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;

sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹ Moreover by them is thy servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

¹² But who can discern his errors?
Clear thou me from hidden faults.

¹³ Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”

Hymn of Praise: [“We Praise You, O God”](#)

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, confronted by your promises, we may embrace and forever hold fast to the hope of eternal life, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

1st Reading: [Nehemiah 8:1-10](#)

2nd Reading: [1 Corinthians 12:12-31](#)

The Gospel: [Luke 4:14-21](#)

Hymn: [“Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling”](#)

The Message: ([Video Link](#))

This morning’s first reading is from a book in the bible which is often overlooked but records an extremely important brief time in the history of the Hebrews. First a brief background is needed. Nehemiah lived during the later years of the 5th century BC. For centuries prior the general area of what is now called the Middle East was dominated by warring super powers, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. The region was in constant turmoil as it is today. During this time the kingdoms of the Hebrews would be determined with the fall of Judah or the southern kingdom to the Babylonians with the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. The city was leveled along with the Temple. Many of the Hebrews, mainly the elite, were taken into captivity and exiled to Babylonia. It must be emphasized that those who were considered to be of little value were left behind.

For approximately 50 years they would remain in exile. During that fifty or so years, the exiled people, and even those left behind, lost their center of religious activity, the temple, as well as being surrounded and influenced by foreign religions and traditions. Their lives had been undermined. That which had held them together as a people throughout their history had been destroyed and taken away. Their normalcy of life found in their temple centered religion was no longer there to unite them or to make them feel personally secure. The truths that they had found in life were now being questioned by the life, religions, and traditions of foreign societies. Also, in fifty years those who knew life before the exile had for the most part died leaving most who would return to Judah and Jerusalem not personally knowing any kind of personal experience in the former Hebrew traditions and even the truths which were found in their law and Temple centered religion. The foreign cultures, traditions, and religions could have begun to alter their lives.

One Jewish historian makes the claim that it was during this period of time that the historic Hebrew religion began to change into Judaism. Without the Temple those who could or had the inclination would still meet together on the Sabbath perhaps giving the early foundation to synagogue worship.

With the end of the exile those who returned to their homeland returned to a destroyed city with a population which had been highly influenced by foreign rule. Their hopes and dreams had been fulfilled but they still had to find that allusive state of a life governed by some kind of normalcy. As pronounced governor of Judah, Nehemiah saw as the first task was to bring some kind of assurance of safety to the people's lives. This meant the repair of the damaged wall around Jerusalem.

After seven months when the damaged wall was repaired the people knew that their damaged life now needed to be repaired with the truth which united their ancestors for generation upon generation. They wanted the reassurance of the Law of Moses. Therefore they gathered together for this reassurance. We read "They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had given Israel. Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding," It is then related that Ezra read from early in the morning to midday and we are told that they all were attentive.

It is interesting to note that recognizing that what was being read would have escaped the minds of the people over the many years of captivity, the Levites, experts in the law, spread out among the people to bring interpretation and answer questions. In order to have any kind of future they knew they had to have unity in a central truth which everyone could live by. This was the foundation for the future a foundation even beyond the Temple which would be built some years later. Occupation of their homeland was the first step in uniting the people but as important or even more so was and is the common belief in governing truths in life. Returning to the fundamentals of their relationship with God would bring not only purpose to their lives but it was a unifying truth.

We have been experiencing our own exile over the past several years which has not only be confining but filled with anxiety concerning the uncertainty as to the future. In many ways we have lost any sense of normalcy. Our fractured society is being fueled by the undermining of anything we have held in the past which gave us unity. Egos, greed, and prejudices have been successful in distorting what is truth in order to deny the common good and welfare of all. We take the internet as our Bible and see what is there as being the truth to live by although it may be created by someone's corrupted mind. We see this most evidently during this pandemic.

Through it all we long for the return of some kind of normalcy when the pandemic finds its way out of our lives and our exile come to an end. But will we find that unity in order to celebrate the return to life unencumbered by the threats of the pandemic like the Hebrews celebrate their return out of their exile as recorded in our lesson today? Will we be able to comprehend these words of the Levites? "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." Will we celebrate as was commanded to the returned Hebrews, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

For the most part our celebration will be limited if at all since we will still be held in exile for the pandemic only has intensified the deep division within our society. There still will be no common truth around which we can unify for truth is held in limbo. We will still be wishing, hoping, and dreaming for some sense of normalcy.

It is doing this time that the church, you and I, must live the truth that we believe. The church must not fall into the trap of being a reflection of society with personal egos, greed, and prejudices governing who we are. Like the Hebrews long ago we must turn to our roots found within the gospel of the good news which fulfilled the scripture of old, "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." To this Jesus states, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The internet is not our gospel of truth but is filled with wolves dressed in sheep's clothing. We must turn to the gospel which directs us to live the truth of God's love which in turn gives us the unity of purpose. As Paul wrote, "But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

If we are truly the Body of Christ then the unity of the gospel of love is shared together in spite of any differences we may have. It is then that we can begin to be that example of unity and hope to the fractured world about us. In living this example we will find hope amidst any disparity and the truth of the gospel of love will give us wellbeing, hope, and a consistent ground of being. That is when the celebration of life becomes a holy day in the sight of God.

Anthem: [“This Little Light of Mine” Odetta](#)

Offering*: ([On-Line giving Link](#))

We give thee but thine own, what e'er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from thee.

The Prayer

Ever present God, your children long for the day when we can be free from the distress and turmoil in which we have been living. Give us the wisdom and tenacity to find the unity beyond all divisiveness. May we find joy in any unified achievement which we pray will occur. Help us to see that we are your children and as such through your love we find that day when we can all celebrate in common without playing to our own egos and personal agendas. Open our hearts and minds in order to achieve this celebration of life together.

We pray for all who need your comforting and healing presence especially Bob and Pat Allen, Eugene Ash, Pam Ash, Heidi Brackbill, Parker Brennan, the Cronin family, Leo Dickel, Dotty Gibson, Kraig Greff, Nancy Griebel, the Johnson Family, Robert Karner, David Kieffer, Pam Lambert, Charles Larsen, Donna Mayhew, the McNamara family, Jane Marzewski, Wendy Neumann, Elise Oliver, Peter Olsen, Brenda Penyak, Dottie Reitz, Robert Reitz, Colin Shea, Jerry Shea, Jack Smith, the Spiegler family, Esther and Buck Trautwein,, Pastor Jack,
We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine upon you;

The Lord lift up His presence upon you and give you peace. Amen

And now my brothers and sisters

Live on knowing God's love,

The joy of living this life of love,

And the peace which only comes through the power of His presence within you.

So live on in Love, Joy, Peace, and Power.

Closing Hymn: [“Word of God Come Down on Earth”](#)

Announcements

Please note that Masks are required while in the church building.

*Offering to be sent to
Robert Brackbill
10274 Raleigh Tavern Lane
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Epiphany Lutheran Church
9122 Sybert Drive
Columbia Hills
Ellicott City, MD 21043

<https://www.epiphanylutherancolumbia.org>

Please note that you now have the opportunity of online giving with the link found after the offering designation or here: https://tithe.ly/give_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/2627291