

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany of Our Lord (C)

Nehemiah 8.1-3, 5-6, 8-10

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 12.12-31a

Luke 4.14-21

The word “church” comes from the Greek *eklesia*, which means, literally, “gathering” or “assembly”. The lessons this week emphasize that we are assembled as one Body. Nehemiah recounts the assembly of Israel to hear the Law after its rediscovery. The psalm reflects the praise which we are to give the LORD in assembly. St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that we are all members of one Body, and in the Gospel Jesus manifests His authority in the assembly.

**Nehemiah 8.2-10**

1. Nehemiah was grouped originally with Ezra, as a single work.
  - a. The separation of these books began with Origen (2<sup>nd</sup> C.) and St. Jerome (4<sup>th</sup> C.), but was not recognized in the Hebrew Bible until the 15<sup>th</sup> century.
    - i. The books do clearly represent different authors.
  - b. Ezra and Nehemiah have been grouped traditionally with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles.
    - i. This association is now questioned, due to differences in theology between Chronicles and these books.
      1. However, Ezra and Nehemiah are not prophets, but chroniclers or historians.
2. Nehemiah records events following the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity in the late sixth century, B.C.
  - a. In the fifth century the Persian emperor ordered Ezra to lead the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, and to rebuild the Temple.
    - i. During the reconstruction the scrolls of the Law were rediscovered.
  - b. In today’s lesson Nehemiah records how the Law was read to the assembled people.
    - i. The reading of the Law reaffirms the identity of the Jews as Jews, as those in covenant with the LORD.
3. The people weep in response to the Law, both reacting to reaffirming their national identity, and in fear of the LORD, that they are transgressors.
  - a. Ezra reassures the people, however, that the LORD rejoices in them, and that His joy offers protection against the judgments of the Law.
    - i. The people’s celebration on receiving the Law is the origin of the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkoth*).

**Psalm 19**

1. The psalm falls into two distinct parts:
  - a. vv. 1-6 as a creation hymn.
  - b. vv. 7-14 as a wisdom hymn.
    - i. The linking of creation and wisdom is not accidental; wisdom reflects a response made on account of and in response to God’s gift to mankind in the order of creation.

2. The wisdom section of the psalm is also broken down into a hymn on the Law (vv. 7-11) and a hymn of confession with prayer for forgiveness (vv. 12-14).
  - a. As with all Creation, the Law is described as a gift of God.

### **1 Corinthians 12.12-27**

1. The idea of society as a body was widespread in the ancient world, but this idea or metaphor was not common in the theology of St. Paul.
  - a. To the contrary, Paul saw society as characterized by divisions (*see., e.g., Gal. 3.28*).
    - i. His reference to the “body” here is, therefore, very intentional, to emphasize the unity of the Christian community.
    - ii. The use of “Christ” here for the community, for the assembly of the Church, is characteristic of this emphasis.
2. Paul emphasizes the common experience of baptism, of the reception of the Spirit, which incorporates each Christian into the common Body.
  - a. His reference to “drink[ing] of the Spirit” is probably not a reference to the eucharist, since the verb form in Greek (an *aorist* verb, *e.g.,* action beginning in the past and continuing into the present) does not suggest this.
  - b. The key statement in this passage is that the “Body does not consist of one member but of many.”
    - i. Just as the human body needs a diversity of members to function, the Church needs a diversity of spiritual gifts, with each Christian making a specific contribution.
    - ii. Just as one part of the body cannot say it does not need another part, the members of the Church need each other and the gifts each brings.
3. God’s plan is revealed in how each member works together.
  - a. The eyes (for example) should not command all consideration. This is revealed in the instinct for modesty.
    - i. “... our less respectable members are treated with greater respect.”

### **Luke 4.14-21**

1. The start of Jesus’ Galilean ministry begins immediately following his temptation by Satan in the wilderness.
  - a. Jesus is “filled with the power of the Spirit.”
    - i. Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom in word and in deed stems from the power of God’s Spirit.
    - ii. Jesus proclaims the fulfillment of God’s promises. This denotes the advent of the Kingdom.
    - iii. Luke also introduces Jesus as teacher; teacher of the Law and of the fulfillment of God’s promises.
2. The verb *didaskain* (“to teach”) is used 14 times by Luke, appearing first in this passage, and including instances of Jesus teaching the synagogue (as here) and Temple.
  - a. Luke calls Jesus “teacher” (*didaskale*) 13 times and “master” in the sense of “instructor” (*epistata*) 6 times.
    - i. Jesus is addressed as “master” in the sense of “rabbi” only twice in Luke.

- b. This recurrent theme in Luke emphasizes Jesus' authority in addressing the people about God and God's plan.
  - c. The fact that Jesus teaches in the synagogue indicates a continuity between His ministry and God's promises of old.
    - i. Jesus Himself confirms this by His statement in the synagogue, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The scripture He reads is from Isaiah.
3. The interpretation by Luke of who Jesus really is occurs in the synagogue, both in the Gospel and in Acts (*e.g.*, 13.13-52).
- a. Jesus is treated favorably by Jairus, ruler of the synagogue (8.41) and rejected in another synagogue (13.14).
    - i. Nonetheless, opposition also arises in the synagogue (in the verses immediately following today's lesson).
  - b. Luke's account is not one of the unbroken revelation of Jesus' glory. The revelation of His glory and authority is always tempered in Luke by the cross.