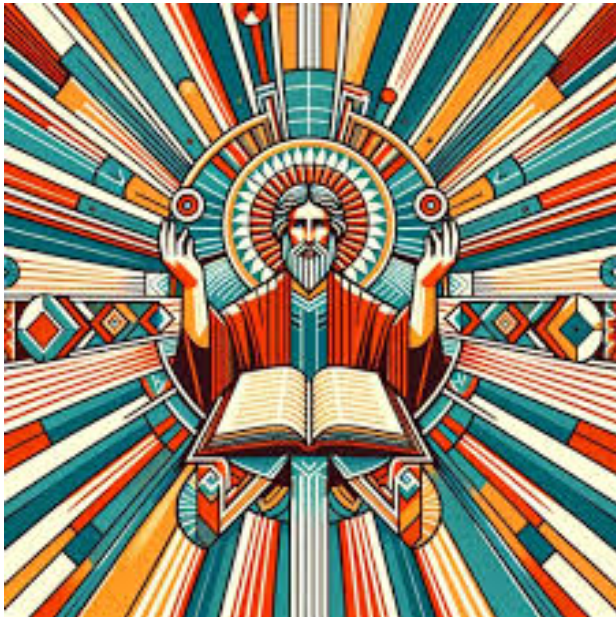




Church of the Epiphany

FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Epiphany 3 • Cloudcroft, New Mexico • January 26, 2025



Collect for Epiphany 3

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Readings for the Epiphany 3

Nehemiah 8:1-12
Psalm 113
1 Corinthians 12:12-27
Luke 4:14-21

Blessed be the name of the Lord, From this time forth and for evermore.

Good morning. I hope everyone is warmed up by now, but not so warm that you are likely to be dozing off. It happens to us all once in a while, and, most assuredly, it happens more easily as we get older.

So perhaps we need a fresh burst of energy if we expect God to answer our prayer in the Collect for this Sunday. "Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works." I don't know about you, but some days I don't answer readily anything or anybody, and I am certainly not into proclaiming anything to "all people." One congregation at a time is challenging enough! But we are not given this prayer with nothing more. Our Bible readings this morning provided some ideas and examples of how the ancient communities went about answering God's call. The readings gave us what we might see as a road map or a job description for our church community in our day. And we are indeed thankful for God's presence in what we are doing here!

The OT reading from Nehemiah gave us a big picture view of what proclaiming God's word looks like. Verse 1 of chapter 8 begins, "And all the people gathered *as one man* into the square." Summarizing the context will help set the stage for us to gain a more complete understanding. The preceding book of Ezra described the return of the exiles to Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and the initial repairs

that were made to the Temple. Then under the leadership of Nehemiah, the returning exiles had also reconstructed the perimeter wall around the city of Jerusalem and had begun revitalizing the temple for worship. Chapter 7 of the Book of Nehemiah details who was who among the returning exiles and where they were from. Chapter 8, from which we read this morning, then sets forth what happened when everyone assembled "as one man" to hear the word of God from the Book of the Law and later celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Please note that this is a gathering of probably thousands of people. Chapter 7 lists over 42,000 returning exiles living in Jerusalem and in the surrounding towns. Some or all of those thousands were likely gathered this day "as one man" in Jerusalem. Ezra, the priest, without the benefit of a bullhorn, read from the Book of the Law. Fortunately, he had help. Remember all those names that were so difficult to pronounce? They were the Levites who, verse 7, "helped the people to understand the Law" and, verse 8, "they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." That is what preachers are supposed to be doing - that's what I am called to be doing - giving the sense. Apparently, the people were able to receive the message for, verse 9, "**all** the people wept as they heard the words of the Law." Now remember these are Jews who had just returned from their 70-year exile in Babylon. No doubt they had heard from parents and grandparents of the trauma of being torn from their homes in the Promised Land to face exile in a strange country with hostile people. Even as they have been rebuilding their lives, they had to have been keenly aware of what led to the Exile to begin with. So the reading from the Law was a graphic reminder of the disobedience and guilt of their forefathers. But as they wept, Nehemiah and Ezra and the other leaders urged them to have hope, verse 10, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your

strength." And celebrate they did, as indicated in the last few verses of the reading. They also shared with those who had none.

So it is not just coincidental that today's Psalm is a celebration of praise and thanksgiving. We have no way of knowing whether the text of what is now Psalm 113 was available in Jerusalem back then, but it would have been quite appropriate. "The Lord's Name be praised from the rising up of the sun to the going down of the same. The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens." It is not too difficult to see why Psalm 113 became the appointed Psalm to go with the Scripture readings on this day of worship.

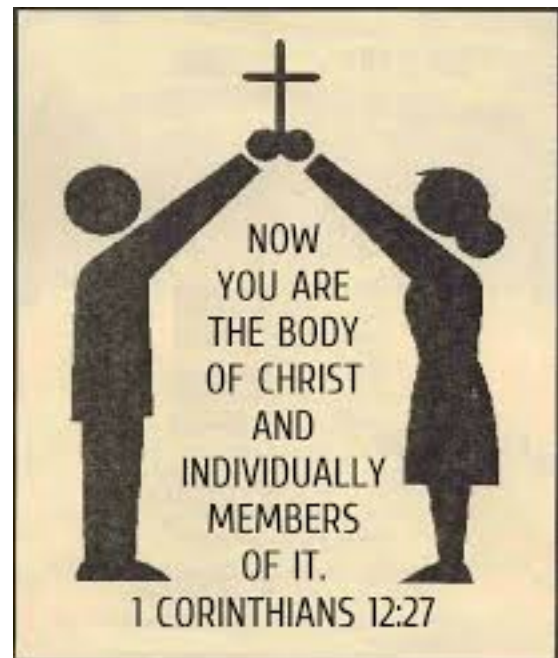
Of course, neither everything nor everybody stays joyous in any community for very long. The Apostle Paul was confronting a number of contentious issues reportedly troubling the church in his First Letter to the Corinthians. We read from the second half of Chapter 12 of that letter this morning and it kind of fits in with what Paul said in the preceding verses of chapter 12. There he wrote that there are varieties of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit, varieties of service but the same Lord, and varieties of activities, but it is the same God who, verse 6, "empowers them all in everyone." In the reading today from verses 12-27, Paul fleshes out what he meant by that. Paul uses the human body as his illustration, pointing to how each organ and each appendage is different, yet each and every one is critically important to the day-to-day functioning of the body. Paul notes that some body parts are more honorable than others. Back where I grew up in Western Pennsylvania, I remember joking about whether West Virginia was the armpit of the nation! We also wondered which state would be selected if God were going to give our country an enema!

Coarse joking aside, Paul's comparison to the human body makes his point quite effectively. Unity in diversity can happen when we all find ourselves living into the ministry to which we have been called, gifted, and equipped by the

Holy Spirit. The elbow cannot decide for itself that it wants to be the nose or the mouth. Those who are left-hand dominant are not readily able to become right-handed. As a community, we are called to help one another open those doors on which we find our own names, the names which God has placed there for each of us. Paul would agree that removing all the name plates as if the doors were all the same is not part of God's plan. It is not good for the community or for the individual. For the community to successfully undertake any particular mission or fulfill a selected purpose, all parts must be involved. Not everyone gets to sit in the pilot's seat. Some maintain the engines, some feed the troops, and others clean up the messes in order to get the job done. So what part of the body of Christ best describes your particular ministry? Do you have a job description? Or just a general idea of what God is calling you to do?

Perhaps one way to consider such questions is to track with what Jesus was saying in today's Gospel reading from Luke chapter 4. Remember Jesus was given the scroll on which was written the words of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus opened to the page He wanted (it is chapter 61 if you want to look it up) and read from what the prophet said. He began by declaring that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. Can you imagine any other starting point? And then look at the verbs in the verses following: "anointed me to," "sent me to," "to set at liberty," and "to proclaim." Confident in His obedience to God's call, Jesus told his listeners directly, verse 21, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Not a sliver of doubt in what He said! He found His mission statement clearly set forth by the prophet Isaiah. So I ask how would you put yourself in these readings? To what type of ministry has God called you? With what gifts has He empowered you to carry out that ministry? We are all part of the body, the body which follows Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Savior. For each and every one of us, that includes basics like what is set

forth in the Baptismal Covenant and The Lord's Prayer. The sense of what we read today is that each and every one of us is called to some particular ministry as an integral part of the whole body. They are all different, but **all** are essential, **all** are life-supporting. The body cannot do without any of us. As Paul concluded, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." And so let us conclude together with a hearty, "AMEN!" Fr. Frank



Prayer List - 1/26/25

Good Shepherd, Hill, NM

Rev. Farhid Adabache

For the residents of Los Angeles and for fire
fighters and first responders

Bishop Steven and Tricia

**Those who need your healing care
and strength:**

Frank & Carolyn Wilson

Ellie

Donya Conine

Wayne Conine Jr.

Rev. Shelby Moon

Esther & Joel Fyock

Deacon Dwight Harp

Cheeta Mc Murray

Rev. Elias Rosales Mendes

Mary Espinosa

Those in the Armed Forces:

Dominick Rankin, US Army, Ft. Bliss, TX

Gabriella Murley, Ft. Bliss, TX

Mason Gregg, Camp Courtney, Okinawa

Creed Napier, US Air Force,

J.W. Grove, US Navy

Nicholas Tran, Joint Base Lewis-McChord

Shawn Zima, Hong Kong

Wyatt Green, US Navy

We pray for our Epiphany family:

Fred and Nancy Griffin and family

Bill Haynes

David, Mico, and Abby LaMaster

David and Jessie Brinkley

Gail Carteaux

George and Gayla Chapman

Old Testament Reading

Nehemiah 8:1-12

8 And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. **2** So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. **3** And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. **4** And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. **5** And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. **6** And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. **7** Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. **8** They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. **9** And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.

10 Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." **11** So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." **12** And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

Psalm 113

1 Praise the Lord. Sing praises, you servants of the LORD; *
O praise the Name of the LORD.

2 Blessed be the Name of the LORD, *
from this time forth for evermore.

3 The LORD'S Name be praised *
from the rising up of the sun to the going
down of the same.

4 The LORD is high above all nations, *
and his glory above the heavens.

5 Who is like the LORD our God, who has his
dwelling so high, *
and yet humbles himself to behold the
things that are in heaven and earth?

6 He takes up the lowly out of the dust, *
and lifts the poor out of the ashes,

7 That he may set them with the princes, *
even with the princes of his people.

8 He gives the barren woman a home to dwell
in, *
and makes her to be a joyful mother of
children.
Praise the LORD.

New Testament Reading

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. **14** For the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? **18** But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. **19** If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. **21** The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, **23** and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, **24** which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, **25** that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. **26** If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. **27** Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

The Holy Gospel

Luke 4:14-21

14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. **15** And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. **16** And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. **17** And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

18

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

19

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. **21** And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

