

Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church
Epiphany 3, January 23, 2022

READINGS:

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

Psalm 19

I Corinthians 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

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

Two men open scrolls of parchment.

Each reads from his scroll to his people.

One man is Ezra the scribe, and the other is Jesus of Nazareth.

Four centuries separate their readings.

A third man writes a letter to be read to a new church in conflict.

His name is Paul, and he is an Apostle of Jesus.

He writes a number of years after Jesus has died, risen, and ascended to the Father.

Today, three readers have read three lessons from the Bible here at Saint Matthew's.

Today is January 23, 2022 - more than 20 centuries since Saint Paul wrote his letter.

And still, we listen to the old, old stories about God and his love for his people - for us!

When the Gospel is read, we still stand up, just as the Jews did when Ezra read from the book of the law.

When we hear the scriptures explained in the sermon, we still sit down, just as Jesus sat with the people in the synagogue at Nazareth.

In our first reading, Ezra is in Jerusalem, after the return of the Jewish exiles from captivity in Babylon, about four hundred years before Jesus' life.

Ezra and the people had worked long and hard to rebuild Jerusalem, and finally, in 516 B.C. the walls were finished and a new temple was built.

The people gathered outdoors near the Water Gate in the new eastern wall of the city at dawn.

Ezra stood up on a high wooden platform so he could be heard and seen, and he read from the scroll that held the book of the law from daybreak until midday!

THAT was a LONG lesson from scripture! It was interpreted by the Levites to be sure all the people understood the sense of what was read.

The people heard the Word of God again, and they were moved to tears!

Ezra and the Levites then gave a very short "sermon."

Go celebrate! Make a party for everyone! Today is holy to the Lord!

Don't be sad - the joy of the Lord is your strength!!

In our second reading, Jesus is home in Nazareth after his baptism and forty days of temptation in the desert.

His journey has been partly physical, and partly spiritual, and he returns, as Luke tells us, "Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit."

He goes into the synagogue, and reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

"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."

And Jesus sits down.

THAT was a SHORT lesson from scripture! Luke tells us that everybody in the synagogue had their eyes glued to Jesus, waiting for what he would say next!

Then, Jesus gives what is probably the shortest sermon EVER!

He says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." That's it!

Paul was a missionary traveler for the Lord Jesus. It seems he was always on the road!

So, when he hears the people of the new church in the Greek city of Corinth are arguing about who is the most important, and forgetting to care for the poor, he writes them a letter. Part of that letter is our third reading today.

Paul wants the members of the church to realize that not everyone has been given the same gifts by God.

He wants them to know that all the gifts, like all the parts of the human body, are equally necessary and equally important.

The church needs all its people, and all their gifts, to carry out the mission of Jesus in the world.

It just won't do for the church to be ONLY a huge, jewel-like eye sitting in the grass - beautiful to see, but connected to nothing! Only an eye will not accomplish the church's mission.

So, people of Saint Matthew's, we still listen to the old, old stories about God and his love for his people - for us! We read the ancient writings because they speak to us of our relationship to God and to our neighbors – today!

And Jesus says to us, as he said to the hometown crowd in the Nazareth synagogue, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

"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."

The mission of Jesus IS the mission of the church. Jesus sends us out in the Spirit as he himself was sent, to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, healing, and justice.

Are we joyful?

Are we apostles, prophets, and teachers?

Are we bringing Good News?

Are we working and praying for justice and healing, acceptance and peace?

Are we good stewards of God's creation?

That is our mission.

Every day Jesus says to us: "Come. Follow me."

Amen.