

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

January 23, 2022

Psalm 19:1–14 (ESV):

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
- 2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
- 3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.
- 4 Their voice 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,
- 5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.
- 6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.
- 7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
- 8 the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
- 9 the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
- 10 More 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 your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

12 Who can discern his errors?

Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

13 Keep back your 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 your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

1st Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 8:1–3, 5-6, 8-10 (ESV)

Ezra Reads the Law

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.

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.

8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

This Day Is Holy

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.”

EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 (ESV):

One Body with Many Members

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.” 22 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. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

Gospel: Luke 4:16–30 (ESV):

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

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.**” **22** And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” **23** And he said to them, “**Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’**” **24** And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. **25** But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, **26** and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. **27** And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” **28** When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.

29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. **30** But passing through their midst, he went away.

Sermon 4 – Third Sunday After the Epiphany

“Do Not Nazareth”

Luke 4:16-30

Dear friends,

Jesus comes home in our Gospel lesson today and it does not go like the people expect. Jesus is often greeted with hostility, the Pharisees try to kill him practically minutes after meeting Him in some Gospels, but rarely do you have such a dramatic swing like this. For some reason, Nazareth, Jesus' own hometown, holds the what is possibly the lamest record for quickest mood swing when it comes to Jesus' preaching. He barely gets halfway through a single sermon before they freak out and start trying to murder Him. Was it something He said? If so, what? That part of the world is very in touch with their emotions, and we all know how quickly mob psychology can work, but even accounting for all that, it doesn't explain why Jesus' hometown folks are so quick to try to toss Him off a cliff. What was it? Well, in order to answer that question we must look at what Jesus actually said. Jesus says that the people so eagerly hearing Him are hearing Him for the wrong reasons, and that in the end all Israel does the same, and so God is going to essentially pass the buck of salvation from the Jews to the Gentiles.

Jesus has been fully commissioned at this point. Not only has He been baptized, but He has suffered in the wilderness and been tempted by the devil. He's been through the wringer already, and immediately after this begins preaching and teaching. Other Gospels tell us that the summary of His preaching is pretty simple: Repent, the kingdom of is at hand. This preaching is accompanied by all kinds of miracles, Luke repeatedly uses the word “power” to describe Jesus' work at this time, the power of the Spirit was upon Him and everyone could see it. When He comes to Nazareth, the people of Nazareth, who grew up with Jesus or watched Him grow up, they're eager to see what the local boy made

good could do. It's an old story. Somebody from your nowhere town gets famous, and when He comes back you want to see what made Him so famous. They get far more than they bargained for in this instance.

I'm going to summarize a little of the first bits. What Jesus reads from Isaiah sounds pretty innocuous, and it is, a nice passage about salvation. We know now that Isaiah was speaking about Jesus Himself, and that's exactly what Jesus says. "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He might as well be pointing at Himself while He says it. Today I am fulfilling this Scripture in their hearing. For years I thought that the crowd got angry at Jesus for telling them He was the Messiah, but notice that this is not what sets them off. **"22 And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?'"** So they're surprised, but they're not ticked off yet. **"23 And he said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'"** Still not upset, though He points out the first bit of trouble here. Jesus points out that the attitude He found in Nazareth isn't exactly helpful. The people of Nazareth are looking for a show. They want to see what has everyone so excited about Jesus from their town. Other Gospels seem to indicate that these people expected a miracle, they expected something spectacular, because they were Jesus' hometown and they figured Jesus kind of owed it to them. You can see indicators of this attitude in their words, but that is what is at issue here. Attitude. As it so often is. The people of Nazareth are basically telling Jesus "dance monkey, do your party tricks, do what everyone's talking about." So the attitude is one of curiosity or even entertainment, these folks want Jesus to give them a show. When you read the Gospels, you get the impression that Jesus doesn't have a lot of time for this attitude. Jesus is receptive to those people that receive Him for who He is, He is here to save them from their sins, to teach them. Jesus is merciful to those who come to Him for mercy, whether from sins or from their illnesses and so on. Jesus is even quite gracious with His enemies, He engages with them, He talks to them, He doesn't just blow them off. This kind of bland curiosity, treating Jesus like a detached, impersonal interest, Jesus often reacts to this

quite strongly. Jesus wants people to come at Him sad or mad, seeking mercy, seeking the truth, even challenging Him. Jesus does not want people to come at Him with nothing in their hearts.

This is evident in what He says next, which is not calculated to win friends or influence people.

“24 And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 25 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, 26 and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” Now again, I don't immediately get why these words bothered people. But let's look at what Jesus is saying. He says, look, in the days of Elijah, there was a famine, and there were lots of people in Israel that Elijah could have helped with his miracles. God didn't want Elijah to help the Israelites, though, so God sent Elijah to Zarephath, which is Gentile country. People in Israel starved to death while the one man who could help them was sent to Gentiles instead. That is an extremely harsh statement. Jesus is basically telling them, “God didn't help you then, and God isn't going to play your game now.”

It wasn't the fact that Jesus said He was the Messiah that would upset them. It was what Jesus said the Messiah was there to do. The people of Nazareth were perfectly happy to have Jesus as their Messiah, but only so long as He did what they expected. Only so long as He followed the playbook they'd written. Jesus is telling Nazareth that not only is He not going to do that, He's not even going to really work among them at all. I'm not doing miracles here, and I'm barely going to preach here, because I'm not just here for you.

One of the things that the Jews often forgot, in their misplaced national pride, was what the Messiah was actually there to do. He was there to save Israel from their sins, sure, but He was also there to preach and expand the kingdom of God way beyond Israel, to the ends of the earth. The Messiah was there to make Israel obsolete. God was done

with working through one kingdom was going to build one church instead, a church which would reside in all kingdoms, in all places, preaching and teaching 'till the end of time. Jesus refused to play nice and be the Messiah they expected. Instead, He would be the Messiah that God wanted Him to be, preaching to save the lost sheep of Israel, then turning away from them to preach to the Gentiles.

Israel was supposed to be God's people, God made them His people. Yet Israel was often the last to believe when God actually spoke to them, or worked among them. This the perennial curse and total paradox of human nature. We who are God's children are often the slowest to listen, the last to learn, and the ones most in need of repentance. It should stand to reason that we have an advantage. We know God, we hear His Word, these things are good. But sin is stubborn, and the devil works overtime, and we are so much more naturally drawn to the devil's lies than God's truth. Again, this doesn't mean we're hypocrites, or that it's hopeless. It means exactly what God says. We need repentance the most. We have no right to stand high-handed or proud over "nonbelievers," and it is so easy to believe that we are better than them. Passages like this remind us that Christians are not better than nonbelievers, we're actually worse. We need to repent as well, repent of our boredom, our stubbornness, our need to have a God who plays by our rules and not His own.

That is the lesson that we can learn from the people of Nazareth. We haven't tried to murder Jesus, we're trying to understand Him, trying to follow Him, and that's good. Sometimes we need to remember that the Jesus we expect is not the Jesus we get. He speaks to us harshly at times, reminding us that we have failed Him, that we have failed each other, that our hearts are rotten. We shouldn't recoil away from that, because we all need to hear it. He speaks to us tenderly at times, telling us He has forgiven our sins, He has made us righteous, He is walking with us through our difficulties. He decides what to do and when to do it, He decides how things should go, how fast, how slow, and how messy. Our tendency as sinners is to micromanage God and forget that we need Him. Nazareth reminds us where that tendency can take us. It's an extreme case, admittedly, but the message is the same. Repent. I'm coming to save my people. I'm coming to save

you. Nazareth didn't want the Gentiles to be saved, they wanted a Savior to dance to their tune. How often does what we want get in the way of seeing what God offers us? Seeing the value of what God does for us?

May we all learn the lesson of Nazareth. God is here to do His work. Not our work, His work, and He will do it His way. Sometimes His way is nothing like we expect, nothing like we'd envision. It looks confusing, frightful, hurtful. But God's way is the saving way, it is the good way.

Amen.