

Sermon for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C, 21.i.2007  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania  
10:00 a.m., Holy Eucharist, LBW/ Setting 2  
Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10, Psalm 19, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a, Luke 4:14-21



Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was  
and Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

. . . and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "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 he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

--Luke 4:17-21

☞☞☞ Oral presentation of today's sermon begins on page 3. ☞☞☞

\*[Today's readings from Holy Scripture all speak, directly or implicitly, of the order of God's will. Psalm 19 glorifies the Creator because of the marvelous pattern of order and

\*Bracketed text not included in oral presentation.

balance in the universe, and for the sheer beauty of creation besides. The stars of heaven glorify God simply by being the magnificent lights they are. If we, too, truly are what we are created to be, we will glorify God consciously, with our whole being. The Apostle Paul points to the intricate order and balance of a healthy, living body, as analogous, with its many parts and members, to the diverse membership of the Church.]\*

[In today's First Reading, from the rededication of the Temple recorded in Nehemiah, and in today's Gospel, the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry according to Saint Luke, God's Law as it is revealed and promised in Scripture is the focus. As Ezra, a scribe or theologian, ritually reads out the over 600 commandments contained in the Torah, the Levites listed in verse 7, not included in

today's reading, help the people to understand these Scriptures, "with interpretation," as we hear in verse 8.]\*

It was [that] interpretation of Scripture, understood as the application of God's commandments to life, that was being given in the Synagogues of Judæa and Galilee in Jesus' day. This was what the people expected, but Jesus had something altogether different to say to His kinsfolk in the Synagogue at Nazareth on His first and last Sabbath as guest Rabbi there. Instead of reading from the Torah, from the first five Books of the Bible, and focusing on one or more of the commandments given there, Jesus chose to read from the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. Instead of saying how the people had not lived up to Isaiah's vision of a society with no losers, instead of saying how the people should overcome their own practice of injustice, or

how they should overcome their own spiritual blindness, or how the LORD was going to get even with the foreign oppressors of Israel, instead of saying anything like the teachers they were used to might say, He simply read the text, as a kind of overture to the rest of His message and ministry, Our Lord simply rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, sat down and, in what might have been a local prize-winning, one-sentence sermon, told the congregation that Isaiah's prophecy had just been fulfilled in their hearing. No one, of course, had no idea what He meant, but it sounded good and it *was* short. If you read on in Luke Chapter 4, or listen carefully next Sunday, you will see what happened when the sermon became interactive.

Do we have any idea what Jesus meant by saying that the words of Isaiah were fulfilled? Note carefully, He did not say that they *had been fulfilled* sometime and somewhere, either long ago or just recently. Instead, Jesus said what neither Ezra nor any of the Levites were able to tell the people as they interpreted the Scripture for the people. Jesus said what neither I nor any preacher before or since that Sabbath in Nazareth could say, for all of us, taken as a whole, in every sermon that has every been preached or ever will be preached, before or after that day in Nazareth, can point toward the fulfillment of God's liberating Word in the future or in the past. None of us can say, in our own name, what Jesus said. Jesus alone could and did say, of the liberation of all those who are

bound by fate or by oppression or by sin, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Yet, that is exactly what He said, and *says*, in *our* hearing. That is exactly what He means, also *for us*. That is exactly what He says to me and to you through the Apostolic Ministry of the Church, through that ministry *He* instituted so that His Word, the fulfillment of God's promise of liberation can and will be proclaimed to His people until the end of time when all bonds of sin and injustice will be released and all things will be restored to the peace of God. It is such a privilege to say those words, but they are not mine: "As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by *His* authority, I declare to you the forgiveness of all your sins . . . . The Body of Christ, given for you; the Blood of Christ, shed for you."

If the poor are still poor without hope of a better future, if *we* have given up on our own future, if those bound to addiction or those enslaved by others are still bound in one captivity or other or if *we* reaffirm our bondage to sin by returning to it, again and again, if we are still blind to the world's manifest injustice or if we live delude ourselves with an imitation of happiness based on what we have and think we own while others live in misery and oppression, then what is our excuse? Can't we hear? Can't we see? Don't we know that the time is no longer our own, that *now* it is the year of the LORD'S favor? *I* didn't say it. *He* did and does. Hear *Him!*

✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has saved us by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever.

✠ Amen.

