

Third Sunday after Epiphany (C) or 3EpiphanyC

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

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

- word of God read, heard, interpreted, satisfies basic intentions of human life
- provokes or creates
- ancient yet ever new
- Nehemiah 8
 - o reconstituted community gathers to hear torah
 - o people begin to weep as scripture explained
 - o day for rejoicing
- Psalm 19
 - o renews, instructs, brings joy, enlightens
 - o also exposes so we can depend on God's mercy
- Luke 4
 - o can bring rejection, rage, delight
 - o initial response = amazement
 - o for non-Jew as well... then hostility and threat
 - o [Hebrews 4:12](#)
- 1 Corinthians 12
 - o community constituted by the word
 - o grapples with diversity as Jesus explains in Luke 4

Nehemiah 8, Texts for Preaching year C

- joy over rediscovery of the Word of God
- difficult to reconstruct historically
- does Ezra precede Nehemiah?
 - o Artaxerxes I and 465-425?
 - o Artaxerxes II and 404-359?
- (1) important step in formation of the Hebrew canon
- (2) rediscovery empowers those who interpret as well as those who hear it read and interpreted
- idea = will of God preserved in body of literature found nowhere else
- yes codes of law
- epics + hymns describe activities of the gods

- idea of divinely inspired anthology of literature declares universal will of God...
- not even until about 400 BC
- not first step toward power of written word
 - o see [2 Kings 22:8-13](#)
 - o this is a crucial moment in history of God's dealing with Israel + humankind
 - o Spirit speaks through words on page
 - o touches + changes human hearts
- also for authority of written word
 - o read + interpreted
 - o why? Hebrew -> Aramaic?
 - o yeah but Targum concerned with meaning as much as translation
- what did Ezra read?
 - o [8:15](#) not found anywhere
 - o probably Ezra knows [Leviticus 23:33-36 + Deuteronomy 16:13-15](#)
- Torah of Moses was energizing + liberating
- why sadness? unclear
 - o [Ezra 10:1](#)?
 - o obvious distance between God's promises and what they experienced?
[Deuteronomy 30:6-10](#)
- joy not self-indulgence
 - o share with members of community
 - o extend to [8:11-12a](#)

Nehemiah 8, Ralph Klein, New Interpreter's Bible Commentary

- initiative came from congregation
- similar to Pentateuch (or that from which Pentateuch developed)
- Ezra + Levites apply to situation
- took place on what would become new year's day
 - o 1st day of 7th month
 - o altar set up... sacrificial worship... and wall
- non-sacral area outside Nehemiah's wall
 - o all who could hear with understanding
 - o focus = reading of Torah
 - o no mention of sacrifices
- about 6 hours
 - o which periscopes were chosen?
 - o echoed by later seating in synagogue

- people stood in reverence
- Amen =
 - o (1) accept blessing
 - o (2) accept law
- hands => obedience + dependency
 - o bowed heads, prostration
- verse 8 מְפָרֵשׁ = ???
 - o extempore translation to Aramaic?
 - o paragraph/sentence by paragraph/sentence
- etiology for synagogue service back to Ezra?
 - o no direct evidence for synagogal liturgy until Roman times
- 8:9-12
 - o day as holy = separated, dedicated to the Lord
 - o joy in the Lord = best antidote to grieving
 - o reading of law and teaching led to
 - o (1) understanding
 - o (2) joy

Reflections

- current dislike of hierarchy
- who has right to serve as priest, member of community?
- here law announced before men, women, children
- first public recognition of Torah authority
- by time of Ezra Pentateuch
 - o (a) was recognized
 - o (b) was in or near final form
- discussion of JEDP theory
- “The old simple distinction between Scripture and tradition has become meaningless. Close study of Scripture shows us that it is the heir of a long period of tradition, that people reworked the tradition in a new age, and that once Scripture achieved its final form there developed traditions of understanding and interpretation. Tradition comes before Scripture – and after it” (803)
- Nehemiah 8 wrestles with the gap between Scripture and contemporary practice
- author trying to bring his interpretation of the text and the text itself into close harmony
- interpretation as “what is written” (?)

- we need guides to understand ancient texts
- theme of joy (we often connect law to legalism)
- 1st reaction = mourning + weeping
- next = day is holy
- time for celebrating + being generous
- joy reflects dedication + commitment to God's way and his Torah
- 2nd day = people noticed dissonance between requirements and what they observed
- they took action, initiated reform
- understanding -> obedience -> great joy
- שמע = understanding and obeying
- do we understand only when it leads to obedience?
- best obedience is total, spontaneous, voluntary