



CHRIST CHURCH, DARTMOUTH
A People United in Justice and Love

January 23, 2022

Sermon: Vanessa Turner, Lay Reader

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Readings: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 • Psalm 19 • 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a • Luke 4:14-21

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

We hear this opening to most people's sermons, but have we stopped to consider what these words mean? Today we find them as the summation to our Psalm, a perfect time to consider what they mean. It is said that King David wrote these as a humble acknowledgment that, though we are not innocent and blameless that we do and would sin, we need the strength of God. Though what we say and think may not always be pure and right, we ask God to redeem us and to transform us into a more obedient and faithful servant.

This appears to be the message throughout our readings today. They speak to us about taking time to reflect on our past, our present, and our future. What an appropriate message for us at this time, as we are both separated due to a pandemic and we are in the midst of a visioning process.

Our three readings today, direct us in the work of both building community and working in the community. In our reading from Nehemiah we are told that the reading of the Torah is meant for all, it is read at the WaterGate rather than in the temple. This is important as women were not allowed to enter the temple. Changing the location to the WaterGate allowed all members of the community to attend and hear the word of God. By being together in community they were able to hear the reading of the Torah together and experience both the pain and the strength. At first they weep, they weep for who they were and what they have experienced together. But they are told instead to rejoice, to rejoice in the strength of the Lord.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians reminds the people of Corinthe that through baptism we share the same water, the same promise, the same Spirit and thus we all equally share in the same body. Paul compares the community of Christ to the human body. He draws attention to the fact that no one part of the body is more or less important than another part of the body. The body must have different parts and gifts, or it would not work together effectively as a body.

Our Gospel reading reminds us that the good news is to be brought to the poor. In this case poor does not just refer to those who are economically disadvantaged. Here the term poor is meant to refer to those who live on the fringes of society such as, the oppressed, those with disabilities, and the incarcerated.

These readings ask us to consider the composition of our community. Who do we include? Who do we exclude? Who is invited and who is left out? This may be one of the questions we are considering in our visioning process. Does our Church reflect the broader community? Who are we including and excluding? These are tough questions with no simple answers, but that does not mean we should avoid them. Fundamentally we must consider that we all have gifts from God and that these differing gifts are important to building the greater community, the Christian community. In this Christian community, all must be equally respected regardless of their class, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality as we were all baptized into one body and were made to drink of the one Spirit.

At Christ Church our vision statement reminds us that “We are called to be a radically inclusive, just, and loving community that seeks to love our neighbour through prayer, worship, action, and advocacy.” Today’s readings remind us of the importance of this statement and the work needed to carry out its truth.

The good news has been offered to us. Will we hear it and receive it as good news to be shared with all, especially the vulnerable? Or will we hear it and hope that it is a message for us alone?