

January 27, 2019

3 Epiphany

Rev Ken Wratten at St Luke's

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

1 Cor 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

Ezra & Nehemiah present 'revealed way of life' to the people

We are all members of one body in Christ

Jesus 'filled with power of Spirit', proclaims to be the Messiah

Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah, who wrote about the price that Israel would pay for their falling away from God, with defeat and exile – which happened in 586 BC. But Isaiah also wrote that God would ultimately return them to their homeland. There would be the feeling of a Jubilee Year – as Moses taught about in Leviticus 25:8-13: A time of release and restoration. Their release from exile happened in 538 BC, when the King of Persia started releasing them to go home.

Nehemiah was a priest, who led the third and last group of exiles home, and he led the important work of rebuilding the wall that had been destroyed, that surrounded and protected Jerusalem. But what Nehemiah found was that their spiritual health was in very bad shape. And so he gathered the people and he and Ezra read to them the Law – the first four books of the Hebrew Bible. The people cried when they realized how far they had fallen from following God's will. There was no Jubilee Year for them.

Jesus was announcing to the people in that synagogue in Nazareth, and to you and me, that HE was the one that Isaiah wrote about. He was anointed by God the Spirit, and HE would bring release and restoration.

It took time for people to understand what kind of release and restoration Jesus would bring. It was not about release from invasion by a superpower. It was release from the grip of sin; from broken or strained relationships; from thinking life is all about 'me' rather than about 'sacred relationships'.

So now we get to Paul's Epistle. He is continuing last week's talk about gifts we get from the Spirit: The gifts that are distributed among us to make the body of Christ strong and a place where transformation can happen. These gifts provide the focus for what motivates what we do as Christians – how we walk the walk. It is about servanthood, and it is about God-centered relationships.

This past week:

Our Preschool – Carol Nemiro sent me a schedule of the chapel topics for the rest of the school year. It is the schedule of topics that she and Rev Ardyss will be teaching through May. All of this work is volunteered. What a blessing they are to our preschool, and our church, and what we stand for.

Our church – Yesterday we had the funeral service – Celebration of Life – for Bob Alvey. Beth and Jean expected maybe 15-17 people to come. This community wanted to make sure the Alvey family felt our connection to them through the many years they served here and worshipped here – before health wouldn't allow them to be here. The church was covered with the flowers you see... There was beautiful guitar-led and recorded music... There were volunteers who set up and decorated the parish hall, and they plan to be back after our services today to put back all the things that were set up 57 people attended the service, and there was a flood of compliments about beauty and warm welcome and hospitality. What a blessing our people gave to the Alvey family, and statement about what we stand for.

It is a rich blessing for us to somehow have God grace us with the ministry of Rev Ardyss, and now Deacon Tina. Each of them volunteers their time with us; and through them we are able to DO so much more, from our little faith family, than we could with me as your part time priest. I don't know how this could happen except by God's favor. This is the year of God's favor.

There is one more blessing I want to be sure you know about. Alice Enyart and I went to the diocesan Board of Trustees and presented our case for the upgrade of our status from Restoration church back to full parish status. They unanimously agreed. We are returned to that full status. That doesn't happen because we had a good year. It is because we have the programs, controls, plans, vision, and management to ensure the Board that we are a solid, well run, longstanding parish, and can be independent. This is a very important transformation for St Luke's, and I want you to be as excited about this as I am. This is the year of God's favor...

I feel the year of the Lord's favor through the generous works of the people I've mentioned, and so many more of you who 'make things happen' that model release from the tensions of this crazy time we live in; and restoration of servanthood and God-centered relationship with each other.

May 2019 be the year of God's favor for each of us, and for this faith family, in everything we take on, to bring honor to God.