

# Worship Service - *"In The Field"*

Epiphany 3, Year C,

23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2022

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 CEV / Luke 4:14-21 CEV

Intro/Prelude [\*Two Fishermen\*](#)

music by Suzanne Toolan, played by Annie Center

## Call to Worship

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us! God has anointed us to bring good news to the poor, To proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free. Let us worship the God of justice and peace!

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

As we gather today, let's give some thought as to how we demonstrate our faith in our daily lives, as we listen to the following selection played by Annie.

Reflection Video [\*In Christ Alone\*](#)

music by Keith Getty, played by Annie Center,

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## Invocation

God of Jubilee, God of freedom, from oppression and healing for the afflicted, we gather to share your Good News. We gather to be transformed as the world is changed.

In this time of worship, may we be fed in body and soul. may the Spirit of the Lord fall upon us, may we be refreshed, anointed, and empowered.

And when our time of worship is ended, send us back out into the world to proclaim the Good News.

We pray in the name and memory of Jesus, our Rock and Redeemer, our Teacher and Guide, in whom we find the path that leads to the Kingdom. Amen.

**We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. (light candle) Amen.**

**In our scripture reading today from Nehemiah, we're told the story of the people hearing the laws from Moses read anew. As we listen to this story, let's reflect on how we react to the covenant we've been given in our faith journeys as followers of Christ.**

## **First Testament Reading – Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 CEV**

On the first day of the seventh month, the people came together in the open area in front of the Water Gate. Then they asked Ezra, who was a teacher of the Law of Moses, to read to them from this Law that the Lord had given his people. Ezra the priest came with the Law and stood before the crowd of men, women, and the children who were old enough to understand.

From early morning till noon, he read the Law of Moses to them, and they listened carefully.

Ezra was up on the high platform, where he could be seen by everyone, and when he opened the book, they all stood up.

Ezra praised the great Lord God, and the people shouted, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed with their faces to the ground and worshiped the Lord.

After this, the Levites Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah went among the people, explaining the meaning of what Ezra had read.

The people started crying when God's Law was read to them. Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher, and the Levites who had been teaching the people all said, "This is a special day for the Lord your God. So don't be sad and don't cry!"

Nehemiah told the people, "Enjoy your good food and wine and share some with those who didn't have anything to bring. Don't be sad! This is a special day for the Lord, and he will make you happy and strong."

**Scripture Video**      [\*\*Nehemiah 8:1-3,5-6,8-10\*\*](#)

**Ezra Reads The Law**

Lectionary bible reading

## **A Time of Prayer**

**Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: [vicarglenn@gmail.com](mailto:vicarglenn@gmail.com), and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.**

## Joys and Concerns

Today, let's remember Robert Oberg in prayer as he recovers from a small fall and other health issues.

Let's also give thanks that Roger and Kathy were not seriously affected by the recent earthquake in Japan.

We also remember those affected by the recent wave of COVID infection, and pray for their healing and restored health.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our hearts to God together in prayer.

## Pastoral Prayer

Eternal God, you are the maker of us all, and we are your creation, people formed in your image, as individuals, as community; formed and fed and furnished with understanding of who you are and of who and whose we are. We worship you today in recognition of your calling, of your communicating, of your caring to invite us to share in your creative and healing work.

We are here because we have heard you speak in us and through others.

Help us, dear Lord, to ever respond to you and your invitation to your grace...

God of all our moments, of our days and our nights, you speak and you act in the world around us, not only to call all people to you, but also to direct and guide us in the way of healing and wholeness. Awaken us Lord, to hear what you would say to us. Help us to open our ears, our eyes, and our hearts to your presence. Help us to know when it is your voice we are hearing and it when it is our prejudices and desires to which we are paying heed....

Lord, we pray that your church may rise up with renewed commitment

in answer to your call, that your people may be instruments of your grace and love....

We pray for those who consider themselves inadequate and dismiss or avoid your calling in their lives. Give them a new vision, a vision in which you are their strength and their hope...

We pray for those who, in answering your call, must leave the known for the unknown, the oasis for the desert, the comfortable for the uncertain.

Grant them courage and steadfast faith...

We pray too, today, O Lord, for those in want and need – for those of us and of the larger community who suffer in body or in soul.

Loving Father, bless us all with an abundant faith, a fruitful ministry, a joyful life. Bless us and all those who gather together to continue the work of Jesus,

who came to heal, save, and deliver us all, Lord, hear our prayers spoken aloud or in the quiet of our hearts, prayers given in the name of Jesus, the Christ, in whose shadow we walk, Amen.

**In our gospel lesson this morning, we hear Luke’s account of Jesus reading from Isaiah’s promises of redemption through the liberating power of the messiah to come. As we listen to these words, let’s think about our role as the body of Christ in the world today.**

## **Gospel Lesson      Luke 4:14-21 CEV**

Jesus returned to Galilee with the power of the Spirit. News about him spread everywhere.

He taught in the Jewish meeting places, and everyone praised him.

Jesus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and as usual he went to the meeting place on the Sabbath. When he stood up to read from the Scriptures,

he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet. He opened it and read,

“The Lord’s Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers,

and to say, ‘This is the year the Lord has chosen.’”

Jesus closed the book, then handed it back to the man in charge and sat down. Everyone in the meeting place looked straight at Jesus.

Then Jesus said to them, “What you have just heard me read has come true today.”

## **Scripture Video      Luke 4:14-21**

[Jesus Reads The Prophet Isaiah](#)

Lectionary bible reading

## **Reflection – “*In The Field*”**

I’m sure we’ve all probably heard of the term mission statement in some context.

Those sentences or phrases that are intended, according to the formal definition, to be a formal summary of the aims and values of a company, organization, or individual. Conventional wisdom suggests that they should include what the organization or individual does for its customers, for the employees or members of an organization,

and it should keep the employee or member focused on the organization or individual's goals. Many of you have probably worked on developing a mission statement before. Was it a fun process? What about the result? What was it like to try to narrow it down to a few statements? While the process can seem difficult and laborious, the end result does make us focus on what we are all about: what our motivation is and what our goals should be. A good mission statement should give us a sharp focus on how and what we're doing in all our activity in support of whatever entity we are working for whether it be ourselves, our work, our volunteer time, and even our faith, as the body of Christ, and as individual members of that body.

Whether we realize it or not, we all bring our own focus to scripture when we read it. The lens we bring with us impacts how we understand the meaning of a particular passage, often by how we define exactly what the gospel means to us, what the good news is that Jesus brings.

Which is what makes our lesson from Luke this morning so relevant. Luke places this story right up front in the progression of Jesus' ministry, while the other synoptic Gospels, Mark and Matthew, place it much later in Jesus' ministry. This episode serves to make this reading of Isaiah as the focus of Jesus' ministry, setting forth the perspective from which it is to be understood, offering us a sense of the core meaning of the gospel, his mission statement as it were. Luke implies that Jesus himself chose to read this part of Isaiah and that he drew selectively on the tradition to emphasize his ministry to the poor and outcast. The narrative makes it sound like Jesus is reading verbatim from Isaiah 61, but if we reference that passage, he is selective about what he reads and what he doesn't. He includes "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" but leaves out the second half of that verse, "and the day of vengeance of our God." He also selectively adds "setting the oppressed free" which is from three chapters earlier in the Isaiah scroll. As was the custom, as a voluntary reader during the service, Jesus would have specifically requested this scroll. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. He intentionally selected this passage to read to make clear who he was and what his mission statement would be. Luke emphasizes that Christ's work was to bring good news to the poor, the downtrodden, the outcast, that concern for the liberation of the impoverished and oppressed was of paramount importance to Jesus' ministry.

As with any mission statement guiding our focus and the lens through which we see things, whatever we take to be the heart of the gospel will be the central shaping force in our life of faith. The author of Luke instructs readers to place this text as the central focus and lens of Jesus' teaching.

As I prepared for this morning, I thought it might be interesting if we took a look at our own mission statement as the body of Christ, and compare it to Jesus' mission statement in Luke 4. Here's what we claim as our mission from the front page of our website. We seek to bear witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

Toward that end... We seek to build a community, grounded in love, whose members empower each other to extend that love to others. We seek God's wisdom, revealed in the living Word and the Spirit which speaks to us still. We seek to be peacemakers

by working for justice for all people. We seek to harness our unique spiritual gifts, as individuals and as a body that our faith would make a difference in our city, our nation, and our world.

To be honest, I was pleasantly surprised when I pulled this up and took a look at it. I think what was developed is actually pretty darn close to the spirit of the focus Jesus took. While ours is a bit on the vague side in comparison, the argument could successfully be made that what Jesus chose as his focus is easily covered in a few of our points. We certainly have the same overall spirit in what we chose as our focus. But that begs the question you know I'm going to ask. Are we truly using our own mission statement as the focus of everything we do and every decision we make? Does it really reflect who we are and what we do? What about the specifics that Jesus drills down to in his statement based on Isaiah?

From the beginning of his gospel, Luke emphasizes that Jesus' work was to bring good news to the poor. Luke's portrayal of Jesus' reading and exposition from Isaiah signals that concern, for the liberation of the impoverished and oppressed was of a primary element of his ministry. Whatever we consider to be the heart of the gospel will be the primary shaping force to our life of faith. The author of Luke instructs readers to place this text based on Isaiah 61 and 58 as the central concern and focus of Christ's teaching.

In today's passage we learn what Jesus came to do. Insofar as we measure our lives against this, we are following Jesus' ministry. The implication of this passage is that if we are going to study, interpret, and follow the gospel, we should keep coming back to this text to measure our work. It's also important to keep in mind the context of this passage. It follows the story where Jesus refused to be tempted and led astray by offers of power and spectacle. Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" and "was led by the Spirit in the wilderness" to be tempted in the preceding text. In today's lesson he returns to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" and reads from Isaiah that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Just as important as the criteria Jesus uses from Isaiah to illustrate his mission statement is the reliance he has on being led and driven by the Spirit in choosing his focus and how he lives out that emphasis. Without the Spirit's influence in our lives, it is easy to get sidetracked from the central message of the gospel that Jesus presents.

The prophets like Isaiah often had to remind the people about God's main purposes. In Isaiah 1, God asks "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?" God indicates there has been "enough of burnt offerings" and that there is no divine delight in sacrifice. God asks, "When you come to appear before, who asked this from your hand?"

It is all too easy to get wrapped up in the same routine every Sunday, to get accustomed to just coming to do one's perceived penance in the church sanctuary and then go about one's life the rest of the week. It's easy to read or hear God's instructions in Isaiah 17 to "learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow" on Sunday, nod in agreement and think

something should be done about that, then head home to catch the football game and go about your day-to-day life as usual.

Luke, in the tradition of prophets like Isaiah, stresses that the ceremonial displays of righteousness and religion are not what is important but underscores the need for acts of human compassion and justice instead. The primary question is not so much what does God demand for righteousness? It is, rather, who needs attention and compassion? Too often we get wrapped up in our own personal salvation, drawn into our own self-focus, that we lose sight of what we're supposed to be actively working at in this active faith of ours. Our passage from Luke makes clear that Christ's mission statement wasn't one of personal piety and acts of penance but one of compassion and justice. When we look at his mission statement, how do our efforts stack up? Is this how we actively live our faith? Is this the gospel, the good news we celebrate?

As I talked about last week, our time together should be celebratory, a veritable party. Jesus presents us with new way of living, a new world that provides compassion for those who have none, justice for those who have been oppressed, and inclusion for those who are outcast. When you look at this divine mission statement, how does this match up with your own focus, your own priorities? How do we as the body of Christ in north Seattle measure up? Paul in I Corinthians talks about our spiritual gifts, how we each represent members of the larger body. How are you being Christ's eyes, mouth, hands, and feet?

As we move into our time to reflect on how we can serve our Savior this week, let's actually take time in reflection and prayer during our time of reflection, and seek the Spirit's guidance in finding at least one thing we can do this week to work this mission statement into our own lives. Our church leadership is actively beginning to look at what our mission is, or should be, and to try to set some goals to focus on to serve that calling. What thoughts do you have? What do you see as our purpose and mission? What might we do differently to better serve that purpose? We often think of the "mission field" as something remote that happens in far away lands, but what is our mission, right here, right now. May we as members of the body of Christ always seek new ways to fulfill his mission statement in all that we say and do, today and every day. Amen.

## **A Call to Serve**

We share from what we have and from who we are as a sign of our desire to bring good news to the poor. May these gifts bring light to those in need, and put the joy of the Lord in their hearts.

**As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online**

donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. Today, as we listen to the familiar hymn, *Here I Am Lord*, let's reflect on what fields we are being called to by our God, as individuals and as the body of Christ.

## A Time for Reflection

### Reflection on the Word [Video]

### [\*Here I Am Lord\*](#)

written by Daniel J. Schutte recorded and posted to YouTube by Everingham Music (Ruth and Joy Everingham), used with permission

## The Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God of all gifts, we join with Jesus in proclaiming the year of your favor. Bless our gifts and bless us as we seek to bring joy and comfort to those who are unknown to us, and to those who are near and beloved. Amen.

## Benediction

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us! We have been called, we have been anointed, we have been given a task. So go out from this place into the mission field that is the world. We go carrying Good News to the world: news about freedom from oppression and healing for the afflicted. The time of the Lord's favor is now! Hallelujah! Amen.

**As we extinguish this candle, let's carry its divine spark into our own lives this week, shining God's light into the lives of all we encounter. Amen.**

## Postlude

### [\*Majesty \(Here I Am\)\*](#)

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