

“WHAT DO WE HEAR”

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

As I read over the lessons for this week, the pairing of the Old Testament and Gospel both dealt with the reading of the Word of God to a group of people who were hungry to hear it, a people who had been in exile and those who were waiting expectantly for the Messiah to appear.

In Nehemiah, the people had returned to Jerusalem after being in captivity, only to discover the destruction of the city walls and the temple. They have been at the work of rebuilding those walls and the temple. During this time, Ezra has also been preparing, gathering together of the law of Moses, the Torah, for the people to once again be able to hear. The time has come and the people have come; men, women, and children gathered to hear, all who could understand. Understand that even with all they had gone through and were going through, God had not left them; yes God is with them. It was time to find joy in the Word, to bow their heads in worship, and for their time of mourning to be over. It is time to celebrate, eat the good food, drink the fine wine and to share with those who do not have. Yes, the Lord God is with them and has given them strength and newness of life and hope.

As we look to the New Testament, what we had not heard is that Jesus had gone through forty days in the wilderness, where he had been tempted by the devil. He had also experienced his own time of exile, you might say, following his baptism. He has now returned to his hometown of Nazareth and on the Sabbath has gone to the synagogue where he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Words of great importance to the people for it is the foretelling of the one who is to come...the Messiah. The words telling of the one who the Spirit of the Lord would be upon, who would be anointed to bring good news to the poor. Good news to those who been held captive, bringing sight to the blind, freeing the oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor or the Jubilee. After he had given the scroll back to the attendant and sat down, the people waited to hear the interpretation he would share about the Word. As he began to speak, his word to them was: ***“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*** Quite a proclamation and one that I would say they did not expect. No, we do not get into all of their reactions this week, for that we have to wait until next week.

Just think for a moment though of those two groups of people who have come together for the same purpose many years apart, to hear the Word of the Lord. To give both groups the good news that their God is alive and well and acting in their lives and giving them strength and renewal.

If we are honest about what has transpired over the past two years, we could easily place ourselves in either one of those gatherings of people. We have been in our own form of captivity and wandering. We have been listening to many voices looking for healing and hope. The voices have been out there, and it is like a cacophony of voices each telling us if you only do _____ (fill in the blank) this virus will go away, and nobody will ever get it again, or die from it. Well, how has that been working? Some days I feel as if we have not made much progress at all, except we are all suffering from covid fatigue.

Yes, our lives have been changed over the past two years. Come to think about it, wouldn't they have been changed in one way or another even without covid? Life does not stand still. The seasons change, our health changes, no matter what age we are. Babies are born, people marry...hopefully the baby is born after the marriage, people die, jobs change, we move to new houses or even to a new state. No, life does not stand still, it is constantly in flux, and we constantly have to adapt to the changes.

I am constantly amazed at the weather forecast in the winter and the reports of how many inches of snow have fallen or how cold it is in up North. I have lived through 36 inches of snow in a week's time, and minus 40 to 45⁰ before the windchill was factored in. As they report it they make it sound like it has never happened before...and now they even name the winter storms. (Isn't that special?) Of course, we cannot leave out the summer months where they make it sound like there has never been heat, humidity, tropical storms or hurricanes before...oh and they are *all* named now as well. I mean wasn't it just the hurricanes that they named in the past?

Yes, life changes and within it we change too. Paul, as he is writing to the Corinthians, is also talking about change and how they in their baptism have been changed and are now all members of one body. How they should look at each other in this body as a whole. His explanation really is so simple. No one is made up of only one body part, it was never intended that we would or should be. We all have different gifts and talents given to us, and we are to use them together to make up the whole.

It is this Word that has been heard over the decades that have brought people together. The Word that has been there for people who are or have been in exile, who are lost, who are hungry, who are sick, who feel as outcasts, who feel hopeless, who are grieving, who are looking for new beginnings. The Word that has brought truth, comfort, and hope over the ages. The Word that causes the Spirit to move within us as we too bow our heads, as we sing praise, and find Emmanuel, God is with us, in Jesus Christ.

Yes, the Word of the Lord, has been with us and especially over the past two years as we have gone through this time in our own from of captivity and wandering. It has been there to give us strength and joy and hope. Especially hope as we move forward in this world of constant change.

Let us close with the prayer from Evening Prayer, which sums it up so well.

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.