

Nehemiah 8:1-10, Luke 4:16-30

This morning we begin in the Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah governed Israel as the people returned from the Babylonian exile. God's children had been in exile for seventy long years living in a land of strange speech, strange customs, strange gods, and strange food. Why the exile? They had veered away from sacred scripture, God's word. They had not put the Lord their God first in their life and chased and bowed down to pagan gods. Upon returning to Jerusalem and find the Temple destroyed and the city a heap of rubble. This exile; harsh, yes, but loving, in the sense that it would move God's people to repent and turn back to Him and live.

So, God brings the people back to Jerusalem. They rebuild the city, begin to rebuild the Temple, and the wall around the city. It is nice to have the city and the walls rebuilt. What needed rebuilding most of all was their identity and faith as God's children. They needed to learn once again how gracious and full of steadfast love the Lord their God is who had never left them even as He disciplined them.

To learn this very important lesson The Priest, Ezra, calls all the people to gather at the dedication of the new wall to listen to God's Word. Specifically, they will hear first five books. They listened. And listen they did! Upon hearing this they are both stunned and delighted. They stood, they shouted Amen, Amen. They bowed their faces to the ground and worshiped the Lord.

What elicited such a response? First, right off the bat they heard how the Lord God had created the heavens and the earth and them. In Babylon they heard the version that man did not really matter at all. Man was a pawn in the god's cosmic chess match. But today they heard something different-they were created in God's image. They were the crown of creation. How Adam and Eve were specially made. Creation of mankind is not just survival of the fittest, but a life to be lived in relationship with God and one another. Creation was for them to enjoy. And they were special to God. We still need to hear this today.

They heard of Adam and Eve's fall and disobedience and how God did not destroy them but promised a savior. Someone who would undo what Satan had done to them. They heard about Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph, Moses, the Exodus from Egyptian slavery, and God's mighty victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea. They heard how the Tabernacle had been designed and constructed. And finally, how God led them into the promised land. They heard it all. The Good and Bad. The obedience and disobedience. Through it all how the Lord Their God's steadfast love and faithfulness had been with them through it all.

Hearing all of this they realized that not only had all this happened in the past, but it had also happened to them. They are now back home from exile, back with their city. What the Lord their God had done with the First Exodus at the Red Sea, He did it again with a second exodus. Yes indeed, they have been heirs of God's steadfast love and faithfulness. This is who God is and this is who they are. In hearing all of this, they were both stunned and delighted. Overjoyed may be better word for it. And so, they cried out their Amen! In agreement and faith.

While all this great, this would only be foreshadowing of what was to come. All this would point to what God would through His only begotten Son. This is true for us sitting here this morning.

This would be so much more than a deliverance from Egypt, and greater than a deliverance from Babylonian exile. This would point our deliverance from our sin, death, and the devil. When Jesus, God's Son comes back home in Nazareth He goes to the Synagogue on the Sabbath. He is asked to read the scripture for the day. He finds the place where to begin and it just so happens that God has already placed the bookmark at the place where Jesus is to read.

In this reading Jesus has Good News for the people just like Ezra and Nehemiah had 500-years earlier.

Read the Text

After that Jesus speaks the most stunning and amazing words that the people will ever hear. "Today This Scripture is Fulfilled in Your Hearing." Yep, the time had come for God to fulfill His promises. The two Exodus's were small potatoes compared to what God was going to do now in Jesus. If you really want to know, it was not this passage that Jesus read that day and what we just heard this morning, that Jesus is the fulfillment of all Scripture. All of Scripture was being fulfilled in Him! He was and is the Savior promised to Adam and Eve.

So, what was the reaction of the people in Nazareth that day? Not anything like the reaction that the people had in Nehemiah's day. We get no 'Amen Brother, preach it,' words from Jesus' hometown people. No one bows their faces to the ground and worships, a description which we have on Epiphany with the wisemen and the shepherds on Christmas. Instead, they respond, "IS THIS NOT Joseph's SON?" A question not so much about doubt but more about expectation. You see healings and miracles had been taking place in other places rather than Jesus' hometown **THEY FIGURED JESUS WOULD COME AND TAKE CARE OF HIS OWN.** Looking for some goodies, not the deliverance that they really need.

The initial delight turns to rage when tells them that this is not what he came to do. Instead of worshipping him they want to throw Him off the cliff at the edge of town, **that no good, lousy, poor excuse of a savior, son of Mary and Joseph.**

Had forgotten the Word of God? Had they forgotten who they were? Had they forgotten God's promises, the promises they really needed? Instead of rejoicing in God's Word – as in Nehemiah's day, They turn against God and His Savior, the one they really needed. Then we hear one of the saddest sentences in scripture, "Passing through their midst, He went away."

What do we take away from this today? We are all on an exodus. Israel was 400 + years in Egypt. Israel was 70-years in Babylon. How long will you and I be on this earth before our exit from this life? 70 years, 80 years, maybe 100-years? And then what? Do we look to God for Goodies in this short time God has given us? Then get angry when the goodies we expect do not come our way? Or do we look for God to lead us to a better way? Do we want the same old life that always leads to death? Or live the new life NOW, that even death cannot end!

This life that Jesus came to give – an exodus from the old life to a new life in Christ; from captivity to freedom in the gospel; All the scriptures tell us and promise us this deliverance, and like in Nehemiah's day, we might know God and who we are as His people. I know we can

rejoice and give thanks and praise for his steadfast love and faithfulness revealed and manifested in Christ Jesus.

That is the truth Jesus desired his hometown people to know, receive and rejoice in. This truth He desires us to know and rejoice in. In other words, Jesus, the Son of God entered our lives taking on humanity, and our death, in order to lead us to our deliverance and our salvation.

Jesus would escape being thrown from the hill that day. To accomplish His promise for us he would go to another hill outside city of Jerusalem. This is His exodus, His death, His resurrection, and ascension, which provide for you the forgiveness of sins and our exodus from this life on earth to life in heaven in His eternal presence.

That exodus becomes ours when like the people of Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea, Our Lord brings you miraculously through the waters of Holy baptism making you His own and forgiving your sins.

Like the people of Israel our Lord provides for your journey with His Word, read daily. His Word preached weekly. Why? So that you will not forget who you are and whose you are and the goodness and steadfast love and faithfulness of your Lord, who has provided forgiveness and the gospel so that you may believe and have life.

That is why we as a church have provided Bible studies and discipleship studies the past year. It is one thing to read this word on your own, but when others are reading with you during the week it good, right, and salutary to gather talk about what has been read and what God is saying to you. My hope for the coming year is that these opportunities may become more numerous

Whenever you hear the words of promise from God, His forgiveness, that you are God's child and is with you, be stunned and delighted. What has happened in the past has and is happening to you in the hearing of this Word. All because of Our Lord Jesus Christ who is the Fulfillment of this Scripture. That is gift unwrapped for you today. Receive it with delight and joy. Bow your heads and worship Him! Not just today, but every time when two or three are gathered in Jesus' name.

May the peace that passes all human understanding keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Alternative closing: One more thing in closing. If you will allow may to say it this way. God does not have a website, or a Facebook account or even a twitter feed. He has a Church. He has people joined to Himself in Holy Baptism and faith and he feeds them with His B&B. This where you are. This where He has promised to be. No longer separated by sin, all forgiven and at peace with one another. That is the way it is In Jesus, The Fulfillment and The Word Made flesh.