



The psalmist implores God to let both the internal and the external be acceptable to God, who is our source for strength and for redemption. As Carter Lester reminds us, “the Scriptures give us a lens to look at this world and our lives through God’s eyes.”¹ This lens is not a one-time, or even an annual event, such as when the ophthalmologist puts drops in your eyes so they will dilate and the doctor can better see if there is any disease affecting your vision.

Rather, the Scriptures as lens are a continual, daily way of looking at the world and at our lives. As the psalmist writes: “one day tells its tale to another, and one night imparts knowledge to another” (Ps. 19:2). Day to night, day to night, over and over again. It is Scriptures, one hopes that gives us a frame of reference that keeps us from presumptuous sins. When our reliance is upon God, and God’s word revealed through Scripture, we have the framework for life that keeps us centered on God and God’s teaching.

We do not walk alone. Rather, as Paul reminds the Corinthians, once again, we are each part of God’s body. And “the eye cannot say to the hand ‘I have no need of you’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable” (1 Cor. 12:21-22). Paul reminds us that what the world values – beauty, wealth, strength and position- are not the only things valued in God’s sight. When we ignore or turn away from helping those whom the world devalues, we also are turning away from God.

One of the hymns that celebrates this vision that we are greater together – and indeed we are not whole unless we accept all, strong and weak alike- is “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord... and they will know we are Christians by

¹ W. Carter Lester in Feasting on the Word, Year C, volume 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2009), 270.

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

our love, by our love.” It is not always easy to welcome the least among us. After all, we are most uncomfortable when faced with those who are different from us. We are too apt to create an “us/them” environment where we know the rules and we know how the game is played. We too often create a life where we don’t even see those whom we categorize as “other” or “them.” When we are asked to step out in faith into the unknown, we too often try to re-rig the rules to get us back to our place of comfort. The other- the alien among us – makes us uncomfortable and uncertain. We shy away from growing because our sense of self is threatened.

And yet, when we hear what Jesus announced through the words of the prophet Isaiah, we hear that Jesus’ ministry is exactly that. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim the release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). Carol Hess says that “whatever we take to be the heart of the gospel will be the central shaping force in our life of faith.”² Put another way, what we value becomes the framework within which we operate. If we value truth, then we tell the truth even when it is not always to our advantage. If we value wealth, we turn away from things that we perceive keep us from accumulating more wealth. Or, as Jesus puts it: “Where your treasure is, there is your heart.” Carol Hess continues: “The primary question is not so much what does God require for righteousness but who needs compassion and attention.”

Our Scriptures tell us what is needed for righteousness- or right relationship with God: love God, love neighbor. For most of us, the hard part is loving neighbor when to do so means we are brought up short, brought to the point of leaving our comfort zone, asked to step out and get our hands dirty, so to speak, in doing something that is new to us and often with people different from us. The body of Christ, however, encompasses all creation – those who are easy for us to love and befriend, and those not-so-much. But it is all of us, together, who are needful to be the body of Christ. It is all of us together who are called to love and serve the Lord.

As we move into Whitlock Hall for our Annual Meeting and a celebratory brunch, let us remember that we are each, in our own way, a member of the body of Christ- with those present and with those who are not here today. As we elect new members of the Vestry and delegates and alternates to Diocesan Convention, be mindful that those persons, together with the continuing members of the Vestry and others in leadership roles, are the persons who will be the face of St. John’s in special ways to the wider community of Crawfordsville and to the Diocese.

As we move forward into 2013 and into a continuing time of discerning who and what God is calling us to be, remember that the main question is what are we doing – and what are we being- as the church, the body of Christ. An Annual Meeting is a particular time when we look back at ministry during the past year through the reports of committee chairs. It is, then, a time when we can stop to reflect on whether we continue ministry as it has been done in this last year or

² Carol L. Hess, *Id*, 287.

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

perhaps whether we need to stretch and try new things. We will not get everything 100% right-but learning through ministry which “succeeds” (whatever that means) and ministry which perhaps falls a bit short of our hopes but stretches us, still keeps us alert to ways in which the Spirit is present with us. Being alert to where and how the Spirit is calling us means we need to continually consider what we take to be the heart of the Gospel. What we use to help shape us into the body of Christ.

As we consider what God is calling St. John’s to be and to do in 2013, consider it from the perspective offered by the Rev. Joan Gray: “When you really think about it”, she says, “this [leading] of the Spirit is the only thing the early church had going for it. It had no buildings, no budget, no paid staff and very few members. The opposite situation may face us: we have buildings, budgets, staff and members, but do we have the power of the Holy Spirit? ... The Holy Spirit gives us something to do for God.... How are we doing as a church? The real question is “As a church, what are we doing for God?”³ How does our ministry evidence what we are doing for God? Where might we, as we go forward, look for new or enhanced ways to “do for God”.

As you elect additional leadership for St. John’s, think about what we are doing for God. Think about where in our community there is need for compassion and attention. When we feel that we just can’t add one more thing to our life, perhaps it is time to lay down something that no longer brings us joy. If what we lay down is taken up by someone else, let us celebrate. If what we lay down is left undone, perhaps it is time to let that task – or perhaps that ministry- lay fallow for awhile. The work of the Lord – the work of ministry- will continue albeit in different ways. What was, what is and what will be are not always exactly the same. Just as we change as we grow from being an infant, to a young person to an adult, so, too, our understanding of God and of our life and ministry can and should change and develop. Change and deepen. What was ministry for us in one season may not be ministry for us in another. And that is ok. In fact, that is necessary. This is not “my” ministry- it is the Lord’s ministry. When we become territorial about the ministry that we are doing, that is a signal that we need to consider laying down that particular ministry and becoming open to new ways in which we serve God. Yes, a new leader for a particular ministry might not lead or structure the work in exactly the same ways I would- and that’s ok. There are multiple ways of being church. There are multiple ways of serving the Lord.

The scribe Ezra read the Torah to the people re-gathered in Israel following their exile in Babylon. It took from early morning until midday. The Scripture was read to all – both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. The ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. The people stood up – recognizing the reverence due God’s word. And when it was done, they lifted up their hands and said “Amen, amen.” They bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord. “So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading” (Nehemiah 8:6,8).

³ Id., 286.

3 Epiphany

January 27, 2013

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

We read the book today and each Sunday. We seek interpretation to help us see how words written centuries ago still have meaning and shape our faith today. We bow our heads. We worship the Lord. We say (together) “Amen and amen.”