

The Third Sunday of Epiphany

January 27, 2013

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

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

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

Last Sunday, the Gospel of John took us to a wedding in Cana of Galilee; this Sunday, Luke takes us to church, to a synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus goes home.

Visualize that synagogue. It's probably about the size of this room, the size of St. John's, Bainbridge. The walls are stone; the floor is stone pavers or pounded earth. Light rays slant down through a few windows set high in the walls. A fine dust covers it all. Men, and only men, of Nazareth sit on benches lining the walls. At one end of the single room there is a cabinet, and ark, in which the precious scrolls of Torah are kept and a table from which they are read.

Of course everyone in the synagogue knows who Jesus is: he's Joseph's boy. He had been gone away somewhere for a short while, but he seems much the same, a little older and a bit more serious, but much the same. Now he's back, and it's the custom to invite anyone who has traveled to read a lesson and make some remarks at the service, give the people some new wisdom or insight. The expectation is that the visitor will select a passage from scripture and expound upon it.

Jesus stands at the table and reads; He selects the reading. It's from the prophet Isaiah; Isaiah is prophesying that the day will come when everything in Israel, all its pains and problems will be made right and peace and justice will reign for the Jews, a people now oppressed and conquered and poor, captives in exile in Babylon. It's a golden age to come: a golden age when God Himself will be present to restore Israel, to lead them home to the land of their heritage, the age of the Messiah. It will be the "acceptable day of the Lord."

Jesus reads well; there are nods of approval, smiles. He replaces the scroll and sits down; they all wait for him to say something about the text he has read. Jesus says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Now the problem arises with the word "acceptable." In English, it usually means no more than that something is all right or at least not too bad; I can live with that. But in the original Greek, translating from the Hebrew, *acceptable* means "to be received." To be accepted, something offered, something received.

Jesus chooses the passage from Isaiah because His time is not so different from the time of the prophet. The people of Israel have strayed far from the closeness of God. They are captives in their own land at the hands of the Romans. Their hopes and dreams have vanished with time.

In essence, Jesus is saying "today," God has placed this offer before you; the age you have longed for is here, fulfilled right here in front of you. It's a gift, a grace of God, held out to you. I am the gift; I am the Messiah. You may "accept," you may "receive" me or not, the gift is given, here and now. The Messiah is sitting among you.

In His Holy Name.