

# Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

January 24, 2010

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

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

<sup>1</sup>All the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. <sup>2</sup>Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup>He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

<sup>5</sup>And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. <sup>6</sup>Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

<sup>8</sup>So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

<sup>9</sup>And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. <sup>10</sup>Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Luke 4:14-21

<sup>14</sup>Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup>He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

<sup>16</sup>When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: <sup>18</sup>"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 release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." <sup>20</sup>And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat

down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

## **"Mission Jesus"**

### **Story One – Part One**

**They had returned from exile in Babylon. Now they were again inhabitants of the land of promise. Finally they were home where they belonged. They gathered everyone together in the town square. There was no temple, there was no worship center, and there was no church sanctuary. So they gathered in the most public of places that everyone had access to—the square by the water gate.**

**As they assembled there that day they did something that they could not do in exile. They read the law in their own land. It was not that in exile in Babylon the Torah was lost—no that was not it. Rather, it was that they were hearing the law read there in their own place.**

**Ezra reads from early in the morning until mid-day. When he begins to read the people stand and they praise. They cry out "Amen, Amen." They are in awe of what is happening. The Word of the One and Only Holy God is being read before them. They cannot help but be in utter delight and joy.**

**They stand on their feet in praise to God for the gift of the Torah. They rejoice and sing and dance and in essence, have a party. They do it to commemorate the reading of Scripture. It is worship in its most basic and wonderful foundation. God speaks and they are the recipients of the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

**\***

### **Story Two – Part One**

I have this XM Satellite radio in my automobile. It is about to expire. I will have to decide if I am willing to pay for radio or not. In this time that I have had it one of the things I have found fascinating is the presence of talk radio. On the regular dial I used to find talk radio about sports, but on the XM radio there are also all kinds of talk radio stations that are about politics.

On one station there is the commentator talking about the Democrats and how they are bringing great down-fall to the nation that we have known. They go on and on about the down side of health care legislation and pit-falls of “tax and spend” liberal politics dominates Washington these days.

Just a few stations in the other direction is the talk radio where one hears about the Republicans and how terrible they are for trying to block health care legislation. There the conservative agenda is looked upon as racist and even falls into the category of evil with George Bush being blamed for every bad think that has happened in the last decade.

Such contrasting points of view are the order of the day. There seemingly is nothing that they have in common.

\*

### Story Three – Part One

The way our Bible is arranged we can just flip right to it. It is easy to find. Isaiah 61. When Jesus was handed the scroll there that day in the synagogue, it was not so much a simple matter as flipping to it. That scroll would have been somewhere in the neighborhood of 24 feet long. It would have taken some doing for him to get to that particular passage.

When he arrived there he began to read to the assembled congregation: *“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 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."*

And then he rolled the scroll back up, gave it to the attendant, sat down in the teaching position, and said, "This is fulfilled in your hearing today." I would bet you could have heard a pin drop in that room for a split second. You see, they knew well these words and they were associated with the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus speaks them there to the people in Nazareth. They are the ones who have watched him grow up. They are the ones who knew well both Joseph and Mary and their other children and relatives too. They watched this Jesus grow into the man he was now.

"Today this is fulfilled in your hearing." Well now...

\*

#### Story Four – Part One

It happens. It has happened before and I have no doubt that it will happen again. It happened this week. We had a child in our day care center "flip out"—for lack of a better term. He would not comply with what was being asked of him and he began to violently act out. It started with his throwing Lego toys at the teacher and then escalated from there.

He started to throw larger toys and other objects at the teacher. One child was sent to go get the director to come and help out in the situation. There was another child who stepped in the way. This child stepped up and stepped into it. He positioned himself between the flipping out child and the teacher and attempted to deflect the toys and shield her from harm.

He stepped right into it. He put himself in the middle.

**\***

## **Story One – Part Two**

**The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. When did we decide that reading the Word of God was not worth a celebration and a party. Nehemiah had it right when he proclaimed that they were to rejoice at the reading of God’s Word. This was a holy act and it was worthy of delight.**

**Somehow we have tended to lose that along the way—that the very holiness of God should cause us to rejoice and celebrate. There is that wonderful sense that we are to rejoice over the presence of the Word of God. We have the Scriptures so available to us. Of your most prized and most used possessions I’m praying that our Bibles are on the list. Your Bible does you no good on a shelf or unopened. Get into it. Read it. Even stand and read it aloud! Allow yourself to hear the Word of God.**

**Just picture it that day as the exiles have returned. All of them gathered there. All of them hearing the Word of God—it was an incredible scene. That word “all” is key to the story of what happens there in the book of Nehemiah. In fact, in the passage, the word “all” appears six times.**

**“All the people gathered...” What we are to get is that this Word of God is not reserved for just those who are the officers or the priests, but it is for the “all.” These promises of God are for us all. We are to rejoice in that we are included in that, and we are to hear a commissioning in it too. We are to hear that we are to share with those who do not know or who have not heard that this is for them too.**

**Rejoice. Dance. Party. Drink wine. Eat steak. This promises of God are for you and your children and your children’s children and your neighbor and their neighbor too! It is for “all.”**

**\***

## **Story Two – Part Two**

**This week the rhetoric continued. The Republicans are the problem. The Democrats are the problem. The rhetoric was the same even if the headline stories were different. Yet—as I dialed back and forth between the two stations, there was something which they had in common.**

**Both the liberals and the conservatives were saying help the people in Haiti. They had found something in common. I don't know if they were listening to each other. I don't know if they noticed it. I sure did notice it. They were on the same side on an issue.**

**They were coming together in saying that we need to help. Basic human needs had somehow brought them across the aisle, out of the aisle, and together. I even noticed on an appeal for help that I saw on television both George Bush and Bill Clinton were standing side by side.**

**The suffering of humanity—the pain of the people in Haiti after this terrible horrible natural disaster has somehow made it possible for us all to stand together. It is in such a moment that I believe we see how things are supposed to always be.**

**That we are to be working together to make a better day and bring about a better world for our fellow men, women, boys, and girls with whom we share this planet—this is what it is all about. We are to work together and we are to help lift each other up. This is how life is really supposed to be. Not the drawing up sides and thinking we know more than the other guy—no. Our real purpose is to work together and together “change lives.”**

**Even in our culture this past week there has been a glimpse and a glimmer of what God is calling us to: “Changing lives.”**

\*

### Story Three – Part Two

***"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 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."***

The anointed one. Bring good news to the poor. Proclaim the release. Recovery of sight. Let the oppressed go free. Proclaim the year of the Lord. Jesus had a clarity to his purpose. This is mission Jesus. He knows what he is about and he is making that perfectly clear.

This little portion of Scripture...this great little portion right here in the Gospel of Luke is about the purpose of Jesus. It is how he understood his role and who he understood himself to be. He never made his life and his living about him—it was always about his mission and what he was called to do.

We see that even clear and even larger with the cross. We see that it is the place where we encounter the favor of the Lord and we as the freed with this good news of God's love that cannot be stopped, moved, destroyed, lost, or altered.

Mission Jesus—anointed, bring good news, proclaim release, recovery, freedom. "Changing lives and growing in God's love." That is what we are all about—it is *the mission Jesus* in us.

\*

### Story Four – Part Two

**He stepped into it. That child that day in the classroom could have stayed away from the problem and continued to do his own thing. He did not. He moved right in. He stepped right up.**

**When the director appeared and told the teacher to take all the children outside and leave her alone with the child that was having the problem, that child who stepped up would not go. He would not leave her alone with what was happening.**

**That action is mission Jesus. That action is what we are being called to. That action is the gospel of Christ. It is the anointed action that we are being called to live out as we hear the Word of God and let it permeate through our being.**

**There is not us and them—there is no me—there is only us. There is only one world and as long as anyone is hurting in Haiti or on Hansen Road or on Haverhill we have to be there. We have to be there “Changing lives and growing in God’s love.” We have to be there because that is who we are called to be.**

**Standing here in the square—at the water gate and at the Baptismal font—it is about “all.” These promises of God are for us all and we are to share it that way. Jesus invites us into this life patterned after his and that of the child in the classroom—we are to step in.**

**Step up. Step in. Change a life! Amen.**