

January 24, 2016

3 Epiphany

Rev Ken Wratten at St Stephen's, San Jose

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 Ezra & Nehemiah present 'revealed way of life' to the people

1 Cor 12:12-31a We are all members of one body in Christ

Luke 4:14-21 Jesus 'filled with power of Spirit', proclaims to be the Messiah

Jesus was asked by the leader of the synagogue in Nazareth to read the scripture lesson to the people he had lived with as he was growing up. He read from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me".

Jesus most certainly felt the anointing of the Spirit by this time in his ministry. This was after his baptism by John, where the Spirit descended upon him 'like a dove', and the voice of God was heard, coming out from heaven, to proclaim Jesus to be God's beloved Son. That was a message no one could miss; Jesus was certainly anointed for the purpose he had been given. That anointing empowered him for his battle with Satan during his forty days in the wilderness, where Satan tried to tempt him away from his mission to be the Messiah. Next, his anointing with God's Spirit filled him with the confidence to go to his own home town, among the people he grew up with, to announce that HE was the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah. Imagine how much courage that must have taken, to make such a bold statement to his friends and neighbors!

In our Old Testament passage for today, Nehemiah was serving as governor in Jerusalem. He led the returning exiles from Babylon in rebuilding the city that had been destroyed by the Persians; but he knew that the spiritual foundation of the Israelites had to be restored too. They needed to be solid in their understanding of, and their commitment to, their life as the people of God, as it was set forth in Scriptures. If that foundation was not strong, there was the danger that the people would turn their attention away from God again, which had led God to allow the destruction of their nation. To guard against that happening again, Nehemiah and Ezra were resolved to remind all the people about *the way of life* that was revealed through Scripture.

Nehemiah and Ezra were anointed by God's Spirit, and that empowered them to be bold in their faith, and guided them in the way they presented God's Word to the people, so that it brought them to tears! Now that was one awesome Bible study!

You and I have this same gift of anointing by God's Spirit, available to us. We receive the Spirit at our baptism; and the question for us to ask ourselves is whether we give permission for God's Spirit to guide us or not; to

empower us or not. The stories of the Bible are stories told about the people who answered YES. In Old Testament times the offer of the Spirit was made to the prophets. In our time, Jesus has offered his Spirit to everyone; to all of us.

And so as we meet later today at our Annual Meeting, to look in detail at what happened last year through the prayers and works of this community; and as we consider visions of God's works for us in the coming year, we need to consider our reliance on God the Spirit to anoint us as a community, and to anoint us individually, for His work.

Paul presents a list of responsibilities that the Spirit provides within a community. There is a distribution of gifts for evangelism to the unchurched, speaking God's will to our own members, teaching, accomplishing big tasks we would think are impossible, and more... It takes all of us working together. Paul makes it clear that no single one of us has all the gifts that are needed to accomplish God's plan for us.

Jesus read from Isaiah that he was sent from God to "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." In the terms of Isaiah, that would have referred to the Jubilee Year (Lev 25:10), a year of release from debt or slavery. And in our time, following the giving of the Spirit to all of us, every time we look for God's Spirit to act through us, we are living in the flow of God's favor.

May 2016 be the year of God's favor for each of us, and for this faith family, in everything we take on, to bring honor to God.