

Third Sunday after the Epiphany Sunday, January 27, 2019

The Collect: Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 read from the Lexham English Bible

All of the people gathered as one to the public square before the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses that Yahweh had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly for each man and woman to hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it facing the public square before the Water Gate from dawn until noon that day, opposite the men, women, and those with understanding. The ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, because he was above all of the people. When he opened it all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed Yahweh the great God, and all of the people answered, "Amen! Amen!" while lifting their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped Yahweh with their noses to the ground.

So they read the book from the law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that they could understand the reading.

Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all of the people, "This day is holy to Yahweh your God. Do not mourn nor weep." For all of the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, "Go, eat festive food and drink sweet drinks, and send a share to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our lord. Do not be grieved because the joy of Yahweh is your refuge."

The Word of the Lord

Psalm 19 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

1 The heavens declare the glory of God, * and the firmament shows his handiwork.

2 One day tells its tale to another, * and one night imparts knowledge to another.

3 Although they have no words or language, * and their voices are not heard,

4 Their sound has gone out into all lands, * and their message to the ends of the world.

5 In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun; * it comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber; it rejoices like a champion to run its course.

6 It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens and runs about to the end of it again; * nothing is hidden from its burning heat.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul; * the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.

8 The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart; * the commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes.

9 The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever; * the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold, * sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.

11 By them also is your servant enlightened, * and in keeping them there is great reward.

12 Who can tell how often he offends? * cleanse me from my secret faults.

13 Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me; * then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, * O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a read from The Message Bible

You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which he has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.)

Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not beautiful like Eye, limpid and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a part of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the "lower" the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept

your part of that body does your “part” mean anything. You’re familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his “body”: apostles; prophets; teachers; miracle workers; healers; helpers; organizers; those who pray in tongues.

But it’s obvious by now, isn’t it, that Christ’s church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, unidimensional Part? It’s not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called “important” parts.

But now I want to lay out a far better way for you.

The Word of the Lord

Gospel: Luke 4:14-21 read from the Modern English Version Bible

Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. And His fame went throughout the surrounding region. He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by everyone.

He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. And He stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. When He had unrolled the scroll, He found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Then He rolled up the scroll, and He gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all those who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Closing Prayer: On January 31st we remember Samuel Shoemaker, priest and evangelist. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*.

Born in Baltimore on December 27, 1893, Samuel Shoemaker was a highly influential priest of The Episcopal Church and is remembered for his empowerment of the ministry of the laity.

While attending Princeton University, Shoemaker came under the influence of several major evangelical thinkers, among them Robert Speer and John Mott. After college, he spent several years in China and came under the influence of Frank Buchman, founder of the Oxford Group, a group initially oriented toward the personal evangelization of the wealthy and influential. Although he would eventually break from Buchman, aspects of the Oxford Group's approach would influence Shoemaker for the rest of his life.

Training for the priesthood at General Theological Seminary, Shoemaker became an Episcopal priest in 1921. After a brief curacy and further involvement with student ministry at Princeton, Shoemaker was called in 1925 to become the Rector of Calvary Church, New York City, a post he held for sixteen years. During his tenure, Calvary's ministry grew exponentially, largely through Shoemaker's ability to hold in creative tension the power of personal evangelism and giving authentic witness to one's faith while remaining faithful to the liturgical and sacramental traditions of the Church.

Two significant movements-Faith at Work and Alcoholics Anonymous-have their roots in Shoemaker's work at Calvary Church, New York. Faith at Work, founded in 1926, grew out of Shoemaker's passion for personal witness in the workplace. In the 1940's, the movement became increasingly ecumenical and many of the leaders of spiritual renewal in mainstream American evangelicalism have connections to Shoemaker's Faith at Work movement.

Also during Shoemaker's tenure at Calvary, New York, Alcoholics Anonymous was founded. Although Shoemaker did not create A.A., his work provided the foundation, based upon principles he learned earlier from the Oxford Group, for the recognition and flourishing of the movement. Much of the teaching upon which A.A., is built bears the unmistakable influence of Shoemaker, who is generally regarded as the spiritual mentor of the movement.

Later in life, Shoemaker served as Rector of Calvary Church, Pittsburgh. He died on January 31st, 1963 in Baltimore.

Let us pray: Holy God, we thank you for the vision of Samuel Shoemaker, who labored for the renewal of all people: Grant, we pray, that we may follow his example to help others find salvation through the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ our Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**