

## Bread for the Journey

A Sermon given at Trinity Episcopal Church, Aurora, IL

Annual Meeting Sunday, January 24, 2010, 9:00 a.m.

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

The Rev. Charles A. de Kay

*Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Please be seated.

Good morning!

Welcome to our annual meeting Sunday! Now some places that's the kiss of death. Around here, well, I hope we inject enough good food, silliness, and even occasionally inspiration to make it worth your entertainment dollar.

Our lessons today start us off brilliantly. Let's begin with the Old Testament reading from Nehemiah. The year is 458 B.C. After the exile, 132 years (6 plus generations) since the fall of Jerusalem; 132 years of bondage in Babylon, the priest Ezra reminds the faithful remnant of their identity. At the square before the Water Gate, where even the ritually unclean are welcome to gather, Ezra reads from the Law of Moses. He teaches the people from their holy texts, their scriptures, their story of their life with God. He interprets their story with grace, so that the people not only hear but understand the meaning. They understand not just what the words mean, but what the words mean to them in their current circumstances. The lesson is so powerful that everyone weeps – everyone, men, women, children alike. Governor Nehemiah declares this day of teaching a day of rejoicing, a day of feasting, a day of wonder in the joy of God.

In the Gospel reading, Luke chooses, in his rendering of the story of the Jesus, to begin the story of our Lord's public ministry with his return to his hometown of Nazareth. We get the local reaction next week. Today, we see Jesus doing what? Reading from the holy texts, the Hebrew scriptures. And then he proclaims that what has been promised by the prophet Isaiah has been fulfilled. He turns their world upside down. How? By taking on his now accustomed role of the Spirit-filled teacher, a rabbi with great gifts of interpretation and authority, which Luke tells us at the outset of the passage that he had been doing with great success in the synagogues around Galilee. Now, back at home, among those who've known him all his life, Jesus, the teacher, drops his bombshell – he has been sent by God, he has been anointed, in other words, he is the promised Messiah.

In our new weekly bible study on Wednesday morning, Kristin LaTour raised the question of: Now why would Luke choose to begin his version of Jesus's public ministry at this point? This may have been as much as a year or even longer after his baptism in the Jordan and trials in the wilderness. Why begin here... teaching in his hometown? Well, we'll get into that more deeply next week, no doubt, as we learn how well his family and friends received this word.

Today, however, we have parallel stories, thus far of men of God reading sacred texts to a gathered group of men and women, and interpreting them. The community has gathered for this purpose. To hear and understand God's word. This is a big part of what we do on Sunday mornings at this service. In fact the service is divided in half between the Liturgy (or work of

the people) of the Word and then The Holy Eucharist (or the Great Thanksgiving). So the first half of our worship service grows out of this ancient tradition of the Israelites.

We now have bible study Wednesday mornings. We have a quarterly book study, that begins next Saturday. And beginning next Sunday, we have an interactive study of the story of the bible. Please come to the annual meeting to hear more about it. We're calling all of these adult formation opportunities "Bread for the Journey."

When tempted in the wilderness to command the stones to become loaves of bread, the half-starved Jesus responded, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,"<sup>1</sup> Jesus, here himself quoting the Law of Moses.<sup>2</sup> When we study God's Word, it's nourishing, sustaining, life-giving, Jesus claims. When we do study God's Word together, in community, honoring all of our diversity of experience and understanding, Episcopalians specifically make the claim that it brings us closer to the truth of God and God's will for us. Our Bread for the Journey is intended to be spiritual nourishment for our lives in God. Please join us for the Annual Meeting to learn more about these programs, and other conversations in the making.

Here I simply want to put in a plug for engaging the Word of God. Reading the bible. Taking scripture seriously. Not being afraid or intimidated by it. Not being dissuaded by those who use scripture to win points. Especially in arguments where you may be taking a different position. Bible study is meaningful and rewarding. As with anything else, the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it.

If you try it, if you really, really give yourself to it – and we will discuss strategies about how you might approach the texts, how even to begin in these Bread for the Journey opportunities – if you give yourself to it, you might find one day that you – like the ancient Israelites in the days when Nehemiah was Governor of Judea – might find yourself weeping tears of joy and wonder, too.

You never know. It's possible you, too, may discover for yourself its life-giving power. You might come to affirm that you, too, "believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation"<sup>3</sup> and that "God still speaks to us through the Bible"<sup>4</sup> as our prayer book asserts. Reading the Bible is worth the challenge. Sometimes it's very helpful to have a guide. Let's make 2010 a year when we take charge of our own spiritual journeys in new ways. May the church be a resources to each and every one of us.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:4.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 8:3.

<sup>3</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, 513, 526, 538.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 853.