Nehemiah 8:1-10

[1]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.

[2]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.

[3]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.

[4]*The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform*
that had been made for the purpose;
and beside him stood
Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah,
Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah
on his right hand;
and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah,
Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam
on his left hand.

[5]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.

[6]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 worshipped the LORD
with their faces to the ground.

[7]*Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah,*
Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah,
Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad,
Hanan, Pelaiah,
the Levites,
helped the people to understand the law,
while the people remained in their places.

[8]So they read from the book,
from the law of God,
with interpretation.

They gave the sense,
so that the people understood the reading.

9 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.

[10]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.'

Reading the Writings This Week

This it the one Nehemiah text in the RCL cycle
I've preached it only in 2010 and 2019 this century
and treated the Chronicler's books in overview study,
late intertestamental products

Our bibles place Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah after Kings,
As if a continuation of those Former Prophets, as histories
Though Chronicles rewrites Samuel-Kings eras
Tanakh places them near the end of Ketuvim, writings

Our Ezra-Nehemiah was Esdras I and Esdras II in the Vulgate,
Esdras B and Esdras C in the Septuagint
Only as late as Luther does this book get the name Nehemiah

Esdras A (LXX) is Esdras III (Vulgate), First Esdras (Apocrypha)
Esdras (Prophet(LXX is Esdras IV (Vulgate, II or IV Ezra (Apoc)
They're offering contested accounts of the early Second Temple
From late 500's BCE through 400's BCE
(up to 8 Maccabees books survey the Greek era BCE)

This tale of rededication of the Second Temple
Within the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem,
In the high holidays season,
Portrays residents of Judea gathered
In a court by the Water Gate

It may remind you of other tales:
Moses addressing Israel at the Jordan
Hezekiah reading the law at the First Temple
60 inauguration ceremonies in the Excited States

It's a model ritual for a nation,
No longer claiming independent isolation as a state,
led by governor Nehemiah, scribe/prophet Ezra
but not a Davidic king, just Persian appointees

Aaronic/Zadokite priests and Levitical ones
Listed in the verses omitted in the lectionary
read aloud the ancient Hebrew scrolls for hours
translated into Targum Aramaic and interpreted

The people weep and celebrate,
in a liturgy of atonement,
confessing the Torah not followed,
and sharing with needy neighbours

In 2010, I tried 'Reading the Word' tied to Nehemiah:
http://www.billbrucewords.com/2010/01/reading-word.html

In 2019, Christian Unity/World Religions Day:
http://www.billbrucewords.com/2019/01/beyond-christian-unity.html

What reaches you this time?
How about June 2025 celebrations of UCC centennial?

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

12 For just as the body is one
and has many members,
and all the members of the body,
though many,
are one body,
so it is with Christ.

13For in the one Spirit
we were all baptized
into one body
—Jews or Greeks,
slaves or free—
and we were all made to drink
of one Spirit.

14 Indeed,
the body does not consist
of one member
but of many.

15If the foot were to say,
'Because I am not a hand,
I do not belong to the body',
that would not make it any less
a part of the body.

16And if the ear were to say,
'Because I am not an eye,
I do not belong to the body',
that would not make it any less
a part of the body.

17If the whole body were an eye,
where would the hearing be?
If the whole body were hearing,
where would the sense of smell be?

18But as it is,
God arranged the members in the body,
each one of them, as he chose.

19If all were a single member,
where would the body be?

20As it is,
there are many members,
yet one body.

21The eye cannot say to the hand,
'I have no need of you',
nor again the head to the feet,
'I have no need of you.'

22On the contrary,
the members of the body
that seem to be weaker
are indispensable,
23and those members of the body
that we think less honourable
we clothe with greater honour,
and our less respectable members
are treated with greater respect;
24whereas our more respectable members
do not need this.

But God has so arranged the body,
giving the greater honour
to the inferior member,
25that there may be no dissension
within the body,
but the members may have the same care

for one another.

[26]If one member suffers,
all suffer together with it;
if one member is honoured,
all rejoice together with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ
and individually members of it.

[28]And God has appointed in the church
first apostles,
second prophets,
third teachers;

then deeds of power,
then gifts of healing,
forms of assistance,
forms of leadership,
various kinds of tongues.

[29]Are all apostles?
Are all prophets?
Are all teachers?
Do all work miracles?

[30]Do all possess gifts of healing?
Do all speak in tongues?
Do all interpret?

[31]But strive for the greater gifts.
And I will show you
a still more excellent way.

Reading the Epistle This Week

This second half of 1 Corinthians is well-used by us
a homily of diversity within a greater unity,
organizational encouragement to members of a whole

Our Calvinist predestinarian ancestors read roles as given –
If your place is foot or eye, don't deny it, or change it
Nor reject what God made as part of our whole

Our consumerist Arminian individualism
With emphasis on choice, conversion
May find this text chafing

That may give an epiphany about the closing bit
The weaker or less respectable members –
And how we embrace them in solidarity, identification

Back in 2007 I offered a conventional 'Anatomy'
http://www.billbrucewords.com/2007/01/anatomy-lessons-icor12.html

In June 2011 'Gifts':
http://www.billbrucewords.com/2011/06/gifted.html

In 2013, I tried 'Peculiar Gifts' tied to 1 Cor 12
http://www.billbrucewords.com/2013/01/peculiar-gifts-lakeview-nownext.html

Last cycle, at Annan:

http://www.billbrucewords.com/2022/01/body-parts.html

Luke 4:14-21

14 Then Jesus,
filled with the power of the Spirit,
returned to Galilee,

and a report about him spread
through all the surrounding country.

15 He began to teach
in their synagogues
and was praised
by everyone.

16 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,
17 and the scroll
of the prophet Isaiah
was given to him.

He unrolled the scroll
and found the place
where it was written:

18 '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,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

20 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.

21 Then he began to say to them,
'Today
this scripture
has been fulfilled
in your hearing.'

Reading the Gospel This Week

Luke presents this launch of Jesus' ministry
on the heels of baptism and temptation in the desert –
back to Galilee, before disciples are called – in Nazareth
a rejection postponed till c.13 in Matt 13, c.6 in Mark

The Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6 is only in this gospel
it lays out a template of a prophet's programme,
for Luke's Jesus the prophet to enact, shaping his life

If you try to act out the story –
How does Jesus read one bit, then roll back to another,
Does he read and teach in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek,
From Nevi'im, Targum, or Septuagint ?

In the last century, we sang and preached Luke 4 lots
the campaign rally slogans of a 'social justice' church
when the UCC touted a social welfare state,
as conscience of the nation – but now?

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