

For a second year in a row, we will have our Annual meeting today on Zoom. This omicron variant of COVID has made us change course once again this year. But things are different from last year. We are in the church, we are listening to Christine's music and if you're at home you can sing aloud. And we have our livestream service well established and working. We continue to gather in whatever way we can to hear God's Word and celebrate the Eucharist and our Church ministries... and hopefulness. And what strikes me about the passages we heard this morning from Nehemiah, Paul's Letter and the Gospel of Luke is that people have **always** gathered, in whatever way they were able; from thousands of years ago until today, to hear God's Word.

And because of that God's Word endures...now through us. Where would we be without our Scripture? Without scripture we might become mired in pessimism about our world and our prospects. How do we keep firm in our faith? We do so by listening and reading and coming together when we are able.

These readings today tell of times when God's Holy Word was being proclaimed to people who were gathered. God has intended from the beginning that it is within a congregation that we keep our community working together for God's will. The popular saying goes, "where there is a will there is a way." For us it's; **Where there is God's will there is our Way!** And so, we keep listening to God's Word.

Around 400 BCE Nehemiah the governor, told Ezra the priest and scribe. to read God's Word to all the people who were recently returned from exile in Babylon. Even women were invited to hear God's word. **Astounding** for that day and age. The people were instructed in the law and then encouraged to celebrate because they were back home, they had God's Love with them, and they could start all over. They were told to share their food and drink with those who had none and not to be grieved.

Jesus, in our passage from Luke had been filled with the Holy Spirit, and was God in the world preaching the Good News. He began his ministry by speaking to his hometown congregation in Nazareth. He read the words of the prophet, Isaiah, and made that passage a new and living truth for the people who were listening. Jesus made a **shocking** statement that the Scripture he read has been fulfilled in the presence and hearing of the people.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul followed brought the Word to people in towns far and near. He brought the Good News for the people in Corinth. And through this they too were

reminded of how God has special plans for each of us no matter what our individual strengths may be. He too is **outlandishly** open minded telling the people the Good News that Jews and Greeks, slaves and free are all equal in God's sight. We were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Our little Trinity Church is now, thousands of years later an outpost of Christ in this little corner of Lime Rock, Connecticut. You attend this church in person or online for reason. It's not because the parish is rich and famous and you might meet somebody of great renown. It is not because this is where great power is found and you might be able to rub elbows with the influential, but because of Jesus. The Spirit of Jesus lives here and teaches us, like millions before us, to listen to the Good News; God's gift to us all of health and salvation which is more valuable to us than human power or wealth.

Week by week we listen to the Word of God. If we listen, we will hear **shocking, outlandish and astounding** things. Because God's word is new and fresh for us every day. God's declarations to us are just as important to us today as we get ready for our annual meeting as they were in 400 BCE when Nehemiah opened his Town Meeting with Ezra reading the Word of God.

We have a wonderful, forward-looking Parish Meeting to get to this morning. But before we get to that, we will once again celebrate the Eucharist. And I'm going to ask you once again to take the Holy Scripture to heart. And make a renewed and concerted effort to find your own personal scripture verses to cling to in your heart for good times and bad, when you're feeling joyous or overburdened. Share with me and each other the astounding, outlandish and shocking Good News which gives YOU life.

Because where there is God's will for us, there we will find our Way.