

26 January 2025

Sermon by Isaac De Jongh.

May I speak to you in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Today is the third Sunday after the Epiphany

**The theme is. "Today is the day"**

### **Readings:**

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

### **Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-6, 8-10**

Today's reading presents a powerful picture of the Israelites gathering together to hear the reading of the Law of Moses, highlighting the transformative power of God's Word when actively engaged with and understood by the community, leading to deep reflection, repentance, and a renewed commitment to God's covenant; that includes the importance of accessible teaching, communal worship, and the emotional impact of encountering scripture in a united setting.

Ezra, the scribe, takes center stage by reading the Law aloud to the assembled people, demonstrating the vital role of knowledgeable leaders in interpreting scripture.

The large gathering at the Water Gate signifies the importance of communal worship and studying scripture together as a united community.

The emphasis on explaining the Law to the people, including women and children, highlights the importance of making scripture accessible and applicable to everyday life.

- **How does Nehemiah 8 challenge your understanding of the role of scripture in your life and community?**

### **Psalm 19**

Psalm 19 tells us indirectly about the concept of "special revelation" and "general revelation". General revelation is the idea that the glory of God can be seen throughout his creation, meaning that everyone on earth must know that there is a higher being even if they have never heard about Jesus.

Creation speaks of God's glory, the skies tell of God's handiwork. The Apostle Paul quoted this Psalm in Romans 10:18, and it was surely the inspiration for his opening argument that God's eternal power and divine nature "have been understood and seen through the things he has made". You don't have to say anything but only sit in silence and know who God is. The general knowledge of God made known in the natural world is refined in the Law, more precious than gold and sweeter than honey.

The declaration that they make wise the simple is a great encouragement that through the Scriptures God imparts sound judgement even to the one prone to making mistakes. The psalm then shifts to consider the human heart and the desire for integrity even within the hidden depths.

The psalm concludes with a prayer, a favorite of many preachers, and one that is appropriate for all believers longing to respond faithfully to the great commission to make disciples. The words of our mouths are to speak for and of Christ, to reveal Christ the Redeemer to others, the Rock in whom alone we can trust. The meditations of our hearts are not emptying our minds but being filled with a clearer understanding of God's revealed glory.

- **How does observing the natural world around you help you see God's glory and power?**

## **1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a**

Paul uses the metaphor of a human body to emphasize the unity and interdependence of the church, where every member, regardless of their specific spiritual gift, is vital and necessary for the functioning of the whole body of Christ; essentially, no one part should be considered more important than another, and all should work together in love to build up the church.

Just as a body has many different parts with unique functions, the church is made up of individuals with various spiritual gifts, all contributing to the overall good.

No gift is insignificant; even seemingly "lesser" gifts are crucial for the body to operate effectively.

The purpose of our gifts is to serve and build up the community, not to seek personal glory or elevate oneself above others.

We should be content with the gifts God has given us, recognizing that our abilities are ultimately from Him, and not be envious of others' gifts.

Each believer has a responsibility to discover and utilize their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church.

- **How does this passage challenge your perspective on your own spiritual gifts and how you utilize them within your church community?**

## **Luke 4: 14-21**

The Gospel reading for today marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, where he declares his mission to bring "good news to the poor," signifying a focus on liberation for the marginalized, including the captive, the blind, and the oppressed, by proclaiming the "year of the Lord's favor" - essentially a message of hope and radical change for those considered on the fringes of society; this is highlighted by his reading from Isaiah 61, which he applies directly to himself, signifying his role as the Messiah fulfilling prophecy, causing both amazement and eventual rejection from his hometown of Nazareth due to their resistance to this radical message of inclusivity.

Think about what's happened for Jesus. He's been baptized and he heard a voice say. "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Then he went to the wilderness where for forty days he was tempted and ate nothing. I see those two experiences as images or metaphors for love and suffering. Love and suffering are the two great teachers in all our lives. They are the two things that have the power to get our attention, make us a bit more self-reflective, and change our lives. They have the power to shape and form our lives in ways other things or experiences do not.

In today's gospel Jesus has returned to Nazareth, the town where he grew up, to the synagogue where he worshipped as a child, and to the people who know him. He takes and unrolls the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah and reads:

*"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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

And then he announces, ***"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."***

But here's what I wonder. Is Jesus the only one anointed to fulfill the words of scripture? What about you and me? Might we not also be anointed to do that? Last week Sunday you were giving the opportunity to affirm your anointment when father Ray anointed the whole church with holy oil.

Those words from Isaiah and Jesus' comment on them are the first recorded words of Jesus' public ministry. The words Jesus reads from Isaiah are not an exact quotation of Isaiah. Jesus has chosen and arranged particular portions of Isaiah's text to create a specific message.

I think what Jesus does today is an expression of his baptism and his time in the wilderness. Love and suffering have been doing their work on him. He's been paying attention and listening to the life that wants to enter the world through him. He's been discerning what matters most to him and the values he wants to embody and live.

It's as if Jesus is saying, "This is who I am and what I'm about. These are the values that energize and drive my life. Today I am giving myself to something larger than myself and my own interests." What if that's our work too? What would that look like in your life today? In what ways have love and suffering shaped who you are and revealed the life that wants to enter the world through you?

Jesus neither recalls the past nor forecasts the future. He comes to his people and speaks about today. He says that today is the day of fulfillment. Is he talking about today, January 26, 2025, or is he talking about today as in that day he was in the Nazareth synagogue? Yes, he is. Today is the day, and every day is today.

If it's not happening today, what does it matter if it happened yesterday? If it's not happening today, it probably won't happen tomorrow. Today is the day. And what we do or do not do today makes a difference for the lives of our children and grandchildren, the life of the word, and what tomorrow looks like.

Today the Spirit of the Lord is here. Today is the day of anointing. Today is the day to bring good news to the poor. Today is the day to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. Today is the day to let the oppressed go free. Today is the day being the day to proclaim 2025 as the year of the Lord's favor.

And the fulfillment doesn't end there. I think Jesus is talking about today, this day as the day of fulfillment, more than he is giving a specific or exclusive list of things being fulfilled. So, we could also say that today is the day to love, today is the day to tell the truth, today is the day to forgive, today is the day to end racism, today is the day to welcome the migrant, today is the day to feed the hungry, today is the day to reconcile and make peace. Today is the day because, as we heard in our old testament reading from Nehemiah, "This day is holy to our Lord." This day. **Today is the day!!!**

Today, not yesterday and not tomorrow, this day, is the day of fulfillment. There is no other day. I won't get yesterday back and I don't know if I'll have tomorrow. Today is the day. If not today, when?

- **In what ways is this fulfillment happening in your life and my life today?**
- **And in what ways are you and I participating in this fulfillment in the life of another today?**
- **How does the concept of the "Year of the Lord's favor" apply to your life today?**

This fulfillment is always in progress. It's who we are becoming and what our lives are to be about.

So, let me ask you this: What's the scripture you've been anointed to fulfill today.

Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. And it either has been, or can be fulfilled in your seeing as well. Whether you realize it or not, you are broken – in total spiritual destitution, captive to your sin, blind to the truth, and oppressed by the enemy of your souls. But by simple faith in Jesus Christ and His work – today, you can find spiritual wealth, release or forgiveness from sin, the light of the hope of the gospel, and freedom from self-administered spiritual oppression. It comes by grace through faith in Jesus – who He is, and what He came to do. Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Amen.