

**The Lessons Appointed for
Use on the
Third Sunday after the Epiphany**



Year C
RCL

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
Psalm 19
Luke 4:14-21

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.*

Psalm 19

Caeli enarrant

- 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.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

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. For 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.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would 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. And if the ear would 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. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a

single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The 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.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

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

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts.

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

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, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

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

SERMON

One of the best ways to determine if your students have really grasped a lesson is to ask them to compare and contrast it with something similar. I bet Paul did this with his students regularly. You just can't successfully compare and contrast two things unless you understand them both well. Better yet, sometimes an unexpected perspective emerges from the attempt. That happened to me this week. Like everybody else in the country, I was following the confrontation between Nathan Phillips, the Native American Vietnam veteran, and the boys of Covington Catholic. My sympathies were with Phillips. He's my age and a veteran, so deserving of respect, but as the controversy developed, I realized I needed to understand the issues better if I were to compare and contrast each side's position. I sat myself down and watched the one hour, forty five

minute video of the entire thing. In that more complete account, it became clear that a small group of African Americans, calling themselves “the black Hebrew Israelites” were the authors of much of the ugliness. As the Washington Post reports,

...a group of half a dozen Hebrew Israelites had, in fact, been goading and preaching at both the Native Americans and high schoolers, using profanity and highly provocative language, for nearly an hour ... Dressed in fringed black garb, some with scarves tied around their heads, they preached what to many were both abrasive and unfamiliar End Times messages — calling Native Americans literal descendants of the Israelite “Tribe of Gad,” the white students cursed “Edomites” and preaching that a nuclear apocalypse was around the corner.

To my surprise, the confrontation between the boys and Nathan Phillips was suddenly the least interesting thing going on. We’ll leave their confrontation for the

talking heads on television while we compare and contrast Luke's account of Jesus at Nazareth with the activities of this awful group of people shouting inflammatory words at both groups.

In our passage from Luke Jesus has gone home to Nazareth to the Synagogue for Sabbath as is his custom. In His travels, he'd developed some fame as Luke tells us:

...a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

Understand that to the people in the Synagogue Jesus was the young man who had made good; they had no conception of Him as the Son of God. He was a local celebrity and consequently, he was chosen to read from Isaiah. He read:

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.

Then Jesus added something shocking:

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled
in your hearing.”

Now we can compare and contrast. On the one hand we have hate filled men claiming to be the “chosen children of Israel” shouting ugly, racist words at everyone not of their group and further claiming to be protected by a circle of invisible angels. On the other hand, we have the local boy who has gone far from home and made good, boldly claiming to be the fulfillment of

prophecy. The comparison is obvious. The contrast could not be any sharper. Both indisputably made shocking claims. How is it, then, that when I read the words of the “black Hebrew Israelites”, they stir such revulsion within me that I can scarcely speak of it, while the words of Jesus trigger only an unemotional agreement within me? Where's the passion? Where's the awe? Where's the intensity? What kind of lukewarm Christian have I become that I can read of Jesus revealing Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy without falling to my knees, overcome with emotion?

There will be a lot of words spoken over the next few days about the conflict between the Covington Catholic boys and Nathan Phillips' group, but those words don't interest me. What interests me is the way that the life, words, death and resurrection of Jesus have become for us so unremarkable, so...normal, I guess you could say.

The “black Hebrew Israelites” stood on the pavement and read disjointed passages of Scripture, claiming for themselves God's approval. Jesus read from Isaiah and claimed Isaiah's prophesy. One event raises within us anger and resentment. Why does the other not raise within us hope and celebration?

It's not surprising to me that the words of the “black Hebrew Israelites” raised such revulsion in my heart. They were words which sought to tear down God's good Creation. What surprised me so was the emotional emptiness I felt when I read the words of Jesus. Words which should make my heart soar in gratitude fell flat. I've heard them too often. They've become too “normal”. They have lost their surprise and impact. But just think of how they sounded to those who heard them for the first time! Put yourself in their sandals. How would the words of Jesus have struck you? Could you have re-

ceived those words as dispassionately as we hear them?
Where is the wonder? Where is the awe when we hear
them today? God Himself, the author of all Creation,
has taken on vulnerable flesh and come to live with us

to bring good news to the poor.

...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.

Hear the words of the Lord, church; hear and rejoice.

The Messiah is come!

AMEN

BENEDICTION

In the Epistle for today, Paul writes:

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 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. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts.

Strive for the excitement, church. Strive for the gift of understanding.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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