

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

OLD TESTAMENT
Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

Ezra Reads the Law

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And 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. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. 6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and 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 as 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 to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

8:1–18 According to the traditional view, the reading of the Law by Ezra would be the first reference to him in almost 13 years since his arrival in 458 B.C. Since he was commissioned to teach the Law (Ezr 7:6, 10, 14, 25–26), it is surprising that there was such a long delay in its public proclamation. (CSB)

8:1 *all the people gathered.* See Ezr 3:1, which also refers to an assembly called in the seventh month (Tishri), the beginning of the civil year (see chart on “Hebrew Calendar”). (CSB)

square before the Water Gate. See vv. 3, 16. Squares were normally located near a city gate (2Ch 32:6). (CSB)

scribe. People took initiative in asking Ezra to read from God’s Law. Ezra previous history is recorded in Ezra 7-19. One task Ezra set for himself was to teach God’s “statutes and rules in Israel” (Ezra 7:10), a responsibility assigned to him by King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:25). (TLSB)

Book of the Law of Moses.† Cf. vv. 2–3, 5, 8–9, 13–15, 18. Surely Ezra could have brought back with him the Torah, i.e., the entire Pentateuch. There is no real reason to doubt that the reference is to anything else. (CSB)

Five Books of Moses (Gn–Dt). (TLSB)

8:2 *first day of the seventh month.* Oct. 8, 445 B.C.; the New Year’s Day of the civil calendar (see note on Lev 23:24), celebrated as the Feast of Trumpets (Nu 29:1–6), with cessation of labor and a sacred assembly. (CSB)

Tishri The Lord had ordained that this was to be a holy day, the Feast of Trumpets. “This is the simple meaning of the [third] commandment: People must have holidays. Therefore, such observances should be devoted to hearing God’s Word so that the special function of this day of rest should be the ministry of the Word for the young and the mass of poor people [Nehemiah 8:2–3, 8]. Yet the resting should not be strictly understood to forbid any work that comes up, which cannot be avoided” (LC I 86). (TLSB)

The convocation when Ezra read God’s Word was held on the day of the Festival of the Trumpets. This day was ideal for this assembly, since an assembly was mandated by the Teaching of Moses (Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1). The assembly was held in the square in front of the Water Gate. This gate on the east side of Jerusalem had not been rebuilt and incorporated into the new wall around the city, so probably only its ruins remained. The idea for reading the Teaching of Moses at this first Festival of Trumpets following the completion of the wall apparently sprang from the people and they recruited Ezra to read to them. (CC)

women. See 10:28. Women did not usually participate in assemblies, but were brought, together with children, on such solemn occasions (Dt 31:12; Jos 8:35; 2Ki 23:2). (CSB)

Women and older children were included in the assembly. (TLSB)

who could understand – The audience included women as well as men and also children old enough to receive instruction. (CC)

8:3 *he read from it.* See Ex 24:7; Ac 8:30. (CSB)

Daniel Webster stressed the importance of a proper foundation on which to establish a new society. Having observed the trend of history he pointed out that “there is no solid basis for civilization but in the Word of God. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 122)

Ezra had to limit himself to selected portions of the Law (he probably read mostly from Dt). (TLSB)

from daybreak till noon. The people evidently stood (vv. 5, 7) for five or six hours, listening attentively to the reading and exposition (vv. 7–8, 12) of the Scriptures. (CSB)

The reading could not continue into the afternoon and perhaps the evening in order to cover the entire Pentateuch because the priests were needed during the afternoon to offer the required sacrifices for the Festival of Trumpets (Lev. 23:25; Num. 29:2-6). (CC)

8:5 *book.* Scroll. (A long strip of leather or papyrus on which scribes wrote in columns (see Jer 36:23) with pen (see Isa 8:1) and ink (see Jer 36:18), sometimes on both sides (see Eze 2:10; Rev 5:1). After being rolled up, a scroll was often sealed (see Isa 29:11; Da 12:4; Rev 5:1–2, 5, 9) to protect its contents. Scrolls were of various sizes (see Isa 8:1; Rev 10:2, 9–10). Certain Egyptian examples reached lengths of over 100 feet; Biblical scrolls, however, rarely exceeded 30 feet in length, as in the case of a book like Isaiah (see Lk 4:17). Reading the contents of a scroll involved the awkward procedure of unrolling it with one hand while rolling it up with the other (see Isa 34:4; Eze 2:10; Lk 4:17, 20; Rev 6:14). Shortly after the time of Christ the scroll gave way to the book form still used today. (CSB)

all the people stood. The rabbis deduced from this verse that the congregation should stand for the reading of the Torah. It is customary in Eastern Orthodox churches for the congregation to stand throughout the service. (CSB)

Praise of God before reading the Scripture has a long history, and this verse is the first known example of the practice. In the church, the congregation customarily stands (as did the people in this verse) before the reading of the Holy Gospel, which is introduced with liturgical praise. (CC)

Out of respect for the Law. (TLSB)

8:6 *Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God* – This title for God occurs only here, though the similar, translated identically in English as “the great God” occurs in Deut. 10:17; Jer. 32:18; Dan. 9:4; Neh. 1:5; 9:32, and its Aramaic equivalent is used in Ezra 5:8 (cf. Dan. 2:45). (CC)

lifted up their hands. Hands were raised during prayer (Ps 28:2; Lm 2:19). (TLSB)

Amen! Amen! The repetition conveys the intensity of feeling behind the affirmation. (CSB)

Chemnitz: “Prayers and invocations are ended with this expression, not only to show that in a general way we approve of the prayer but also that it may be applied personally” (LTh 2:492). (TLSB)

The people uttered their “amen” with the gesture of lifting up their hands, a common posture of prayer and praise to God in both OT and NT times. (1 Ki. 8:22, 38, 54; Is. 1:15; Ps. 28:2; 44:20; 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; Job 11:13; Lam. 3:41; Ezra 9:5; 2 Chr. 6:12-13, w9; 1 Tim. 2:8). This was followed by kneeling and bowing to the ground in humility before God and His holy Word, another frequent posture of worship in both Testaments (E.g., Ex. 34:8; 2 Chr. 20:18’ 29:30; Mt. 2:11; 14:33; 28:9; 1 Cor. 14:25; cf. Gen. 24:26, 48; Ex. 4:31; 12:27; 1 Chr. 29:20; Acts 9:4; Rev. 1:17), one even used by the angels and the saints in heaven (Rev. 4:10; 5:8, 14; 19:4). (CC)

It is also like when we say “This is the Word of the Lord” and “Thanks be to God.” (CSB)

worshipped. In its original sense the Hebrew for this verb meant “to prostrate oneself on the ground,” as the frequently accompanying phrase “to the ground” indicates. Private acts of worship often involved prostration “to the ground,” as in the case of Abraham’s servant (Ge 24:52), Moses (Ex 34:8), Joshua (Jos 5:14) and Job (Job 1:20). There are three cases of spontaneous communal worship in Exodus (4:31; 12:27; 33:10). In 2Ch 20:18 Jehoshaphat and the people “fell down in worship before the LORD” when they heard his promise of victory. (CSB)

faces to the ground. Sign of humility and repentance (Ezr 9:5; 10:1) (TLSB)

8:8 *clearly.* Rabbinic tradition understands the Hebrew for this expression as referring to translation from Hebrew into an Aramaic Targum. But there is no evidence of Targums (free Aramaic translations of OT books or passages) from such an early date. The earliest extensive Targum is one on Job from Qumran, dated c. 150–100 B.C. Targums exist for every book of the OT except Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah. (CSB)

Levites repeated the words loudly and distinctly for all to hear and perhaps paraphrased in Aram what Ezra read in Hebrew for those who no longer understood the original language. Some rabbis regarded this as the beginning of synagogues and the Aram Tarums. (TLSB)

Some consider it to mean that Ezra read in Hebrew while the assisting men translated the words of the Teaching into Aramaic, an interpretation that is as old as the Talmud. Williamson translates it as “paragraph by paragraph,” since the verb “clear” can denote making divisions. Whatever this word implies, it is certain that the activity made the sense of the text clear to the laity so that they understood what was being read. (CC)

understand. That is the right kind of religious service, when the Word of God is read and explained, and when all who hear it accept it in all sincerity, with praise and thanksgiving to God. (Kretzmann)

8:1–8 Nehemiah’s efforts result in an opportunity for Ezra and others to teach God’s Word to the Judeans. God’s Word is our source of peace and blessing. Support the proclamation of the Word not only by your offerings and service but, most important, by hearing and studying it. The clear teachings of Scripture will clear your heart of doubts and grant you abiding faith. • Grant us, O Lord, faithful preachers and teachers that we may receive Your Word with peaceful hearts. Amen, Amen. (TLSB)

8:9-12 The Word of God contains both Law and Gospel. The Law in the text that was read and explained moved the people to sadness over their sins, which however, was not the purpose of this day. Instead Nehemiah advised the people to eat the festive food prepared for the day and to share with those had nothing, so that all could receive the blessings of God. Nehemiah’s solution to the people’s grief was the Gospel: “the joy of Yahweh is your strength” (8:10). While the reading of Moses’ Teaching contained Law, which always accuses the hearers of their sins and brings them sorrow and contrition, the Pentateuch also contains magnificent Gospel promises of forgiveness and the Messiah, which bring joy to the penitent sinner. It is joy in the Gospel that is the believer’s ultimate strength. Nehemiah’s encouragement, reinforced by the Levites (8:11), pointed the people to the comforting Gospel, so that the joy of Yahweh overcame their sorrow, and they celebrated the day (8:12). (CC)

8:9 *Nehemiah ... Ezra.* An explicit reference showing that they were contemporaries (see 12:26, 36). (CSB)

In the report of the religious activities (chapters 8-10), Nehemiah’s name occurs only here and in 10:1. (TLSB)

this day is holy – Set aside for “a holy convocation,” “proclaimed with blast of trumpets” (Lev. 23:24). Completion of the walls made this day particularly joyous for the people of Judah. (TLSB)

Do not mourn or weep. Evidently, what the people heard Ezra read made them realize that they had cause to grieve in repentance for their sins, as King Josiah did under similar circumstances (2 Kings 22:11, 19). Grief over breaking God’s Law was in order; the proper time to express this was coming (chapter 9). (TLSB)

When the people of Israel examined themselves, they realized they had been unfaithful. They wept tears of repentance. The preaching of God’s law had achieved its intended purpose when is

aroused an awareness of sin, but the assurance of forgiveness and mercy would soon bring joy to replace the tears. Ecclesiastes tells us there is “a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance” (Eccl 3:4). There are appropriate times to mourn over our sins. In our worship calendar Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are such days. On the other hand, there are times when such sorrow and gloom are inappropriate. Christmas and Easter are such days. (PBC)

8:10 *eat the fat*. Delicious festive food prepared with much fat. The fat of sacrificial animals was offered to God as the tastiest element of the burnt offering (Lev 1:8, 12), the fellowship offering (Lev 3:9–10), the sin offering (Lev 4:8–10) and the guilt offering (Lev 7:3–4). The fat was not to be eaten in these cases. (CSB)

sweet wine – Good quality wine, not bitter or sour. (TLSB)

who have nothing. It was customary for God’s people to remember the less fortunate on joyous occasions (2Sa 6:19; Est 9:22; contrast 1Co 11:20–22; Jas 2:14–16). (CSB)

the joy of the Lord is your strength – The Hebrew word for “joy” is used only here and in 1 Chronicles 16:27. (TLSB)

“Joy is derived from the verb “rejoice.” (CC)

Strength – One pleased and content in the Lord is secure from the attacks of others, just as soldiers within a stronghold are secure from attack. (TLSB)

EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

One Body with Many Members

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. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should 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. 16 And if the ear should 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. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 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.” 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice

together. 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 miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and 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 with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

12:12 *body is one...members...manys.* This example illustrates the unity and diversity of the different spiritual gifts exercised by God's people, who are all members of the one body of Christ. (CSB)

The image of the body was often used by Greco-Roman authors concerned for the unity of the body politic. Here Paul's concern is the unity of the church. The analogy of the body and its members was a favorite of his. (CC p. 444)

with Christ. With Christ's body, the church, of which he is the head (Eph 1:22–23). (CSB)

12:13 *one Spirit we were all baptized.*† Through baptism, a means of grace, the Holy Spirit produces faith in believers and makes them members of Christ's body, the Christian church (cf. Jn 3:3, 5). (CSB)

Ebaptisothamen – This is the Spirit's action in Baptism that makes us part of the community. We are not chosen by peers, nor do we pass some kind of test that qualifies us for membership. It is done to us and not by us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

The Spirit not only surrounds us through the water of Baptism but is within us, as the Spirit dwells within. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

The basis for unity of the diverse parts within the body of Christ is their common Baptism with one Spirit into one body. Paul has in mind here the sacrament of Christian baptism, whereby a person is incorporated into the body of Christ (Gal 3:27-28). Baptism – Christian Baptism with water in the triune name of God (Matt 28:19) – grants the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, and incorporates the baptized believer into Christ and the Christian church, Christ's body. (CC p. 444)

Pentecostal doctrine of a second baptism is, by its very nature, divisive, because some believers then consider themselves to be on a high spiritual level than other ordinary Christians. It leads to arrogance and to despising brothers and sisters who are equals in Christ. (CC p.445)

Jews or Greeks. In Christ there is no racial or cultural distinction. (CSB)

slave or free. No social distinction. (CSB)

all were made to drink of one Spirit to drink. God has given all his people the Holy Spirit to indwell them (6:19) so that their lives may overflow with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23; cf. Jn 7:37–39). (CSB)

12:14–20 Addressed mainly to those who feel that their gifts are inferior and unimportant. Apparently the more spectacular gifts (such as tongues) had been glorified in the Corinthian church, making those who did not have them feel inferior. (CSB)

Paul presents an imaginary conversation among the parts of the body. The spokesmen are those parts of the body who may be inclined to make invidious comparisons with other parts that seem more important. So the foot, depressed by its comparatively lowly status and the drudgery of its work in supporting the whole body, compares itself with the more versatile and skillful hand; the ear becomes discontent with its simple and less-prominent function and compares itself with the more attractive eye. As Chrysostom noted, we are not so likely to envy those who are far superior to ourselves, but those who are a little superior. In their depression and jealousy, the foot and the ear are tempted to opt out, discontinuing their faithful service to the body. (CC p. 446)

But Paul insists they cannot opt out. Their only proper place is within the body. If everyone could have his wish and become the eye, we would have a grotesque situation, a body consisting only of an enormous eye. In that case, how would that fantastic organism hear? Their distinctive functions are part of His perfect plan for the whole, a plan which the individual believers should accept humbly without jealously eyeing what another has been given. As one commentator explains:

Every member cannot have the same function, and therefore there must be higher and lower gifts. But pride and discontent are quite out of place, for they are not only the outcome of selfishness, but also rebellion against God's will. This has two points; it was not our fellow-men who placed us in an inferior position, but God; and He did it, not to please us or our fellows, but in accordance with His will, which must be right. Who is so disloyal as to gainsay what God willed to arrange?

The body is like a choir or an orchestra, where each singer or musician has an assigned and vital role in producing a pleasing result. The quiet worker may be disregarded by the "movers and shapers," and yet be making a greater contribution to the life of the church. No one's service is insignificant. (CC pp. 446-447)

12:14 As the human body must have diversity to work effectively as a whole, so the members of Christ's body have diverse gifts, the use of which can help bring about the accomplishment of Christ's united purpose. Each must properly exercise his gifts or effectively use his position for the good of the whole: e.g., the gift of the message of wisdom, the message of knowledge, the position of apostle, elder (1Pe 5:1), deacon (Ac 6:1-6). (CSB)

12:17 *whole body were an eye* – This shows that each part is important and is needed. Each of us an individual cannot provide all the services that the body needs

12:18 Paul stresses the sovereign purpose of God in diversifying the parts of the body; by implication he is saying that God has arranged that different Christians in the body of Christ exercise different spiritual gifts, not the same gift. And this diversity is intended to accomplish God's unified purpose. God's method employs diversity to create unity. (CSB)

God arranged the members – *etheto* – He does this just as he wishes because he knows what is best for the whole body and also for each individual part. He does so for the purpose of the kingdom. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Paul attributed the diversity within the congregation to part of God's plan. People are most comfortable with those like themselves. Paul is asking them to see the benefits of their diversity. (TLSB)

12:19 *were a single member* – It is very common to criticize others when they think and act differently than we do. But if we were all the same many of us would be redundant. A body with all eyes isn't a functional body.

12:21–26 Addressed mainly to those who feel that their gifts are superior and most important. These verses provide another indication that some gifts, like tongues, had been magnified as being preeminent. (CSB)

12:21 The principle here is the interdependence of the parts of the body in the one whole. Christians in the body of Christ are mutually dependent as they exercise their distinctive functions. (CSB)

12:22 *weaker are indispensable*. Christians who seem to have less important functions in the body of Christ are actually indispensable. (CSB)

Paul's use of the word "weaker" reflects his statement in 1:26-27, where he speaks of God's choice of "the weak things of the world" (the apparently less influential things) to shame the strong things. Paul may also be alluding to 8:7, 9, 10, where he told the Corinthians not to offend, but to protect the "weak" Christians. They are essential parts of the body, Paul says here. (CC p. 443)

God's ways are paradoxical, as demonstrated in the OT (cf Gn 48:17-20) and Jesus' teachings about His kingdom (cf Mt 19:30). (TLSB)

12:23 *the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor*. Just as we give food to the stomach, though it is a less attractive part of the body, so we should give honor and support to the Christians in the church who have ordinary gifts (in their functions). (CSB)

the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty. Christians whose functions may be very obscure in the church are to be given special respect. (CSB)

Our unrespectable parts are treated with even more respect. This seems to be the best way of reproducing the play on words in Paul's Greek. (CC p. 443)

The hand and the feet are respectable enough not to need covering. Other less sightly parts of the body, however, such as the arms, the chest, and the legs were normally covered by the tunic and cloak. And even greater care was taken to provide a modest covering for the sexual organs and the buttocks. A feature like the face, however, needed no covering. (CC p. 448)

2 Samuel 10:1-7, 13-14, "*In the course of time, the king of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun succeeded him as king. ² David thought, "I will show kindness to Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me." So David sent a delegation to express his sympathy to Hanun concerning his father. When David's men came to the land of the Ammonites, ³ the Ammonite nobles said to Hanun their lord, "Do you think David is honoring your father by sending men to you to express sympathy? Hasn't David sent them to you to explore the city and spy it out and overthrow it?" ⁴ So Hanun seized David's men, shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their garments in the middle at the buttocks, and sent them away. ⁵ When David was told about this, he sent messengers to meet the men, for they were greatly humiliated. The king said, "Stay at Jericho till your beards have grown, and then come back." ⁶ When the Ammonites realized that they had become a stench in David's nostrils, they hired twenty thousand Aramean*

foot soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zobah, as well as the king of Maacah with a thousand men, and also twelve thousand men from Tob. ⁷ On hearing this, David sent Joab out with the entire army of fighting men. ¹³ Then Joab and the troops with him advanced to fight the Arameans, and they fled before him. ¹⁴ When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans were fleeing, they fled before Abishai and went inside the city. So Joab returned from fighting the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.”

12:24 Persons with more spectacular gifts do not need to be given special honor. (CSB)

composed – Used to describe the blending of paint colors. (TLSB)

12:25 *no division*. Paul used the same word (schisma) in 1 Cor 1:10 and 11:18 to describe the “factions” in the church, which involved a faulty understanding of Holy baptism (1:12-17) and an improper practice of the Lord’s Supper (11:20-26). His concern for the Corinthians’ unity in the Gospel keeps resurfacing. (CC p. 443)

same care for one another – The verb *marimnao* means to take “anxious care.” The believer is released from care for himself, for he is assured of his heavenly destiny. But this release from self-centered cares sets him free to care for others. Both Paul and Timothy exercised genuine pastoral care for the churches (2 Cor 11:28; Phil 2:20). (CC p. 443)

Instead of nurturing divisiveness, the various parts of the organism should be anxiously and thoughtfully concerned about one another. The heart should care for the kidneys for the lungs, and so on, “for we are members of one another” (Rom 12:5). In his emphasis on caring for one another, Paul is laying the groundwork for 1 Corinthians 13, his great chapter on love. Self-centered individualism can only prove destructive for the welfare of the whole; love on the other hand, always builds up. (CC p. 448)

12:26 *every part suffers*. In the body of Christ if one Christian suffers, all the Christians are affected (cf. Ac 12:1–5—the martyrdom of James and the imprisonment of Peter). (CSB)

A toothache makes one feel miserable all over. The philosopher Plato remarked that “when one’s finger is hurt, one does not say, ‘My finger is in pain,’ but ‘I have a pain in my finger.’” And the presence of pain causes the whole body to react, releasing adrenaline. When a runner has one inflamed Achilles tendon or one pulled muscle, even if the rest of his body yearns for exercise, he must wait until the one injury is healed. (CC pp. 448-449)

On the other hand, when a part of the body has been suffering finds relief, the whole body shares that sense of relief. And when a part of the body is honored (e.g., “you have a beautiful smile”), the whole person basks in the glow of the compliment. (CC p. 449)

12:27 *you are the body of Christ*. Addressed to the local church at Corinth. Each local church is the body of Christ just as the universal church is Christ’s body. (CSB)

The body is Christ’s and it is our privilege to be a part of it. As a result of being chosen to be a part of it, it also a privilege to use our gifts to serve the whole body as our reasonable response. (CSB)

12:28† The list here differs somewhat from that in vv. 8–10. Paul notes three of the gifted individuals of Eph 4:11, then five of the spiritual gifts listed in vv. 8–10. The apostles and prophets were part of the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20), and teaching was associated with

the pastoral office (Eph 4:11; 1Ti 3:2). These three gifted individuals are listed as “first,” “second” and “third,” indicating their importance in the church. The rest of the list is introduced with “then,” indicating the variety that follows. Paul’s lists of spiritual gifts seem to be largely random samples. (CSB)

apostles. Those chosen by Christ during his earthly ministry to be with him and to go out and preach (Mk 3:14). They were also to be witnesses of the resurrection (Ac 1:21–22). The term may occasionally have been used in a broader sense (Ro 16:7; Gal 1:19). (CSB)

In Corinthians “apostle” usually refers to the Eleven plus Paul and has the specific or narrow meaning of an eyewitness of the risen Christ, who was also called to the office of “apostle.” In 15:7 (and possibly 15:9), and sometimes in Paul’s other epistles (e.g. 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25) “apostle” may have a more general or broader meaning akin to “minister” or “church worker.” (CC p. 452)

Pastors today are not eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (unlike the “apostles,” who were), nor do they receive immediate special revelations (unlike the “prophets” who did). But pastors are called to the office of preaching and teaching the Gospel from the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, which are God’s definite special revelation. (CC p. 452)

prophets – These gave vital guidance to the young church at critical moments and shared with the apostles the honor of having a foundational role. They received special divine revelations. Like the “apostles,” they were unique to the early church. (CC pp. 452-453)

Just as the OT prophets were essentially “seers,” who were given visions and taken into God’s council (Jer. 23:18) to receive His word and then communicate it to the people, so the NT prophets were filled with the Spirit and given special revelation to proclaim (Luke 1:41, 67). Thus the quintessential prophetic book in the NT is the book of Revelation, which the Spirit-filled seer calls words of the prophecy. In addition to John, other apostles also were given special revelations, including Paul himself. (CC pp. 429-430)

Stemming as it does from direct divine revelation, the phenomenon of biblical prophecy may not simply be equated with preaching. The distinction is that prophecy involved new revelations from God, while preaching was the proclamation and dissemination of the Gospel and other articles of the faith that had already been revealed. (CC pp. 430-431)

Paul wanted everyone in Corinth to be able to prophesy (1 Cor 14:5). But with the passing of the apostolic age and the decreasing need for this foundational gift (Eph 2:2), it gradually faded from the scene. In the OT the prophets were not a continuous institution; God raised up prophets when and where He willed. Sometimes they abounded. At other times in Israel’s history, prophecy was scarce. (CC p. 431)

Therefore we should not be surprised if in the NT period too the gift of prophecy came and went in various places and times as the Lord saw fit. The chief reason for the decline of prophecy is that it was replaced by the written Word of God. Holy Scripture is even more reliable than firsthand experience. (CC p. 431)

teachers – This third group seems to designate a distinctive kind of church servant, paralleling the fourth group listed in Eph 4:11. those who were both “pastors and teachers.” Paul refers to the teaching role of the overseer (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7) and the elder (1 Tim 5:1-2, 17, 19; Titus 1:5) entrusted with the pastoral care of local churches (teach – 1 Tim 4:11;

6:2; 2 Tim 2:2). One of pastor's chief qualifications is that he be "apt to teach" (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:24). Especially since the price of hand-copied books was beyond the reach of most Christians, the pastor-teacher had an important role in publicly reading and expounding the Scriptures (1 Tim 4:13). That teaching office continues to be carried out today by pastors and by Christian teachers and other called ministers of the Gospel. (CC p. 453)

helping. Any act of helping others may be the product of a spiritual gift (cf. Ro 12:6–8), though the primary reference here is probably to a ministry to the poor, needy, sick and distressed (cf. Ac 6:1–6). (CSB)

administration. Those with gifts of administration were enabled by the Holy Spirit to organize and project plans and spiritual programs in the church. (CSB)

The list in this verse is not meant to be exhaustive. If Paul were to try to list every gift, there might be as many as there are parts of the body. (CC p. 454)

12:29–30 *Are all apostles ... ?* Christians have different gifts, and no one gift should be expected by everyone. (CSB)

12:31 *earnestly desire the greater gifts.* The Corinthians were apparently seeking status through the exercise of the gifts that seemed to them to be more important. (CSB)

Paul lists these edifying gifts first; see note on, 14:1 – [Prophecy is established as one of the chief gifts (12:28–31). See note, v 3. Luther first applied ch 14 to the whole congregation (AE 40:22–23), but his view changed. He later wrote, "He is not commanding the congregation to preach, but is dealing with those who are preachers in the congregations or assemblies.... The lesson was sung or read by one or two.... Then one of the prophets whose turn it was spoke and interpreted the lesson.... When one was through, another might have something to add in confirmation or clarification" (AE 40:389). Luther's mature view agrees with synagogue practices in the first century, which the early Christians adopted (cf Ac 13:14–16; 15:13–21)]. See further note on 14:3 – Prophecy, as preaching, makes the meaning and application of God's teaching clear (vv 24–25). See pp 1077–83. Luth: "St. Paul writes of the office of preaching in the congregation, to which [the congregation] is to listen and to learn from it, when he says: Whoever comes forward, and wants to read, teach, or preach, and yet speaks with tongues, that is, speaks Latin instead of German [as happened in Luther's day], or some unknown language, he is to be silent and preach to himself alone. For no one can hear it or understand it, and no one can get any benefit from it. Or, if he should speak with tongues, he ought, in addition, put what he says into German, or interpret it in one way or another, so that the congregation may understand him" (AE 40:142).] (TLSB)

still more *excellent way.* Paul now shows the right way to exercise all spiritual gifts—the way of love. He does not identify love as a gift; rather, it is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). (CSB)

There is something greater than attaining these gifts: love, as described in ch 13. (TLSB)

To be sure, he has just encouraged the Corinthians to strive for the greater gifts. But he would have them aspire to something higher still. Whatever their gift may be, he would have them exercise it in the superior way of Christian love. For only through love will the whole body of Christ be able to function smoothly and grow (Eph 4:16). Paul does not classify love here among the spiritual gifts. As we have seen, the gifts are not parceled out equally; one person receives one gift, another person receives something different. But love, as the first and highest fruit of

the Spirit (Gal 5:22), transcends all the gifts and is to be cultivated equally by all believers. (CC p. 455)

12:12–31 Paul seeks to settle and unite the Corinthian congregation by emphasizing the order God established in creation and the priority of the Gospel. The sin of arrogance plaguing the Corinthians still disrupts congregations today when roles of service are not clearly defined or valued. Yet also today, Christ unites us in Baptism and makes us His very Body. Though wounded and afflicted, His Body can never be destroyed but carries out God’s loving purposes. • Grant me refuge, dear Jesus, in Your holy wounds, from which You poured life and blessing for me and for all. Because You value all Your people, teach me to love and serve them humbly according to my calling. Amen. (TLSB)

GOSPEL Luke 4:16-30

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and 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 proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” 20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” 22 And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” 23 And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Physician, heal yourself.” What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.” 24 And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 25 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, 26 and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” 28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away.

4:16 *He came to Nazareth.* Not at the start of his ministry but perhaps almost a year later (v. 23 presupposes that Jesus had already been ministering). Probably all the events of Jn 1:19–4:42 occurred between Lk 4:13 and 4:14. (CSB)

as was his custom. Jesus’ custom of regular worship sets an example for all his followers. (CSB)

Jesus worshiped regularly and so fulfilled the commandments in this regard (cf 2:22, 41). (TLSB)

to read. Jesus probably read from Isaiah in Hebrew, and then he or someone else paraphrased it in Aramaic, one of the other common languages of the day. (CSB)

Any qualified male could read from the Hebrew Scriptures in a synagogue. (TLSB)

4:17 *The scroll of the prophet Isaiah.* The books of the OT were written on scrolls, kept in a special place in the synagogue and handed to the reader by a special attendant. The passage Jesus read about the Messiah (Isa 61:1–2) may have been one he chose to read, or it may have been the assigned passage for the day. (CSB)

Typical manuscript format of the time, which would be displaced by the “codex” (book) beginning in the first century. (TLSB)

Jews preferred to preserve the sacred Scriptures in “scroll” form and still read from scrolls in synagogue worship today. Among the Dead Sea scrolls found in 1947 were two of Isaiah. One is extant almost in its entirety and dates from ca. 100 B.C. It consists of strips of leather sewn together to form a scroll 24 feet long and 10 inches wide. Because of this length, it took some effort to unroll it to this particular passage. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

prophet Isaiah – Probably a selection from a prescribed lectionary. The reading appointed for this day, from Is 61:1–2, has an unmistakably messianic character. (TLSB)

4:18 This verse tells of the Messiah’s ministry of preaching and healing—to meet every human need. (CSB)

Spirit of the Lord is on me – The first words of Jesus’ public ministry are a reference to the Trinity. Jesus means that Isaiah’s words refer to His baptism, where the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and the Father’s voice proclaimed Him the Christ, who would accomplish the Trinitarian plan of salvation. (CC p. 192)

he has anointed me. Not with literal oil (see Ex 30:22–31), but with the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

recovering of sight – The only mention of a miracle in the Isaiah quotation. Healing the blind is a prominent theme throughout Isaiah. This sight is both physical and spiritual. The fact that Jesus physically healed the blind is an essential part of Jesus’ testimony to John that He is “the Coming One” (Lk 7:21-22). And Jesus’ last recorded miracle before entering Jerusalem is the healing of a blind man (18:35-43). On the other hand, prominent in Luke’s gospel is the theme of spiritually closed eyes that are opened by the power of God to see and believe in Jesus. (CC p. 193)

liberty those who are oppressed – ἄφεσις – Release has a wide range of meanings, frequently centering on the sense of forgiveness, and indeed this noun (like the verb from which it is derived, ἀφίημι) often refers specifically to the forgiveness of sins, as in 1:77; 3:3; 24:47. This release comes through the forgiveness of sins that Jesus himself brings. (CC p. 190)

The application of Isaiah 61 to Jesus highlights the essence of his proclamation as “release.” The word for “release” (ἄφεσις) is often translated “forgiveness,” and indeed in its three other occurrences in Luke (1:77; 3:3; 24:47), it specifically means the forgiveness of sins. Here it is rendered with the more general term “release,” meaning liberation from the bondage of sin, sickness, and Satan. At times this will involve physical healing, exorcism, and rebuking destructive forces of nature, in addition to forgiving sins; see comments below on this pericope. *Throughout, this commentary will continue to note how Jesus in his ministry carries out this*

programmatic fulfillment of prophecy by releasing creation from its bondage to sin and restoring it to its proper state of harmony with the Creator. (CC pp. 192-193)

4:19 *the year of the Lord's favor.* Not a calendar year, but the period when salvation would be proclaimed—the Messianic age. This quotation from Isa 61:1–2 alludes to the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:8–55), when once every 50 years slaves were freed, debts were canceled and ancestral property was returned to the original family. Isaiah predicted primarily the liberation of Israel from the future Babylonian captivity, but Jesus proclaimed liberation from sin and all its consequences. (CSB)

This refers to the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-55), when once every 50 years slaves were freed and debts were canceled and lost property was returned to the original owners. While this was great, the people tended to go back to doing the things that had gotten them into trouble. Jesus' freeing people was done only once and was good for all time. We can constantly have that freedom by our daily confession. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

4:20 *sat down.* It was customary to stand while reading Scripture (v. 16) but to sit while teaching (see Mt 5:1; 26:55; Jn 8:2; Ac 16:13). (CSB)

Typical posture of a teacher. (TLSB)

eyes of all...fixed on him – Obviously, Jesus' reading of these words had a profound impact on the hearers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

4:21 Rabbis commonly taught on the Scripture passages just read from the lectionary, like sermons today. (TLSB)

today – With this word Jesus announces the inauguration of the eschaton. This is a profound Christological statement that identifies the kingdom of Jesus. Jesus announces in Galilee that the Jubilee year is now present in Him and His ministry. This message of release unites the OT and NT. It reveals to the hearer how His Baptism initiates him into a life of continual release, sustained in the Lord's Supper. (CC pp. 193-194)

has been fulfilled in your hearing – Peplartoi – This is the perfect tense, signifying completed action that affects the present: in Jesus the Scripture has been fulfilled and remains so today. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

4:22 *spoke well* – Martureo – Means to “testify favorably, speak well of, approve.” This refers back to verses 14 and 15. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

they marveled – Thaumaso – This is used to express the people's surprise and wonder in miracle stories such as Mk. 5:20; Lk. 8:25; 11:14. It is also used, as in our text, for the wonder and awe created in the hearts by the teaching of Jesus. Certainly this reflects on the statement at the end of our text that Jesus taught as one who “had authority” (verses 32,36) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

isn't this Joseph's son – The People of Nazareth must have known Jesus since he was a boy. Probably he was trained in their midst as a carpenter. We gather that he had received no rabbinic schooling beyond the normal Jewish upbringing and synagogue instruction. Their question could be understood favorable: isn't it amazing that a son of Joseph can teach like this? But it could also be understood negatively, and that appears to be the direction in which their thoughts turned.

From where does he get this authority? Can an unschooled son of a carpenter be a rabbi, much less the Messiah? Jesus did not conform to their expectations, leaving them perplexed and confused. They kind says this is great, BUT. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

ἐμαρτύρουν αὐτῷ—The imperfect verbs in this verse give a sense of the continuing agitated reaction. The dative after μαρτυρέω can designate the person about whom testimony is given (BAGD) 1 a; cf. Acts 10:43; 22:5). (CC)

4:23 *proverb* – παραβολήν—This is the first occurrence of παραβολή in Luke’s gospel. Here is the only time it refers to a proverb or shorter saying like the Hebrew לְשׁוֹן usually does. (It is the title of the book of Proverbs.) Every other occurrence refers to what we commonly think of as a parable, i.e., an illustrative story. (CC)

hometown. Nazareth. Although Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he was brought up in Nazareth, in Galilee (1:26; 2:39, 51; Mt 2:23). (CSB)

what you did in Capernaum, do here – He uses his omniscience to discern their thoughts. Jesus confronts the flaw in their thinking – that his Word is trustworthy only if accompanied by miraculous signs. Based on Jesus’ response, their thinking must have been something like this: “The man speaks with authority and claims to be the Messiah, but we really know where he is from. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

4:24-27 Jesus’ words outraged his audience because they subtly made a case for including Gentiles in the Messiah’s salvation. Elijah and Elisha are examples of prophets who previously extended God’s grace to Gentiles. (TLSB)

4:24 *truth* – ἀμήν—This word always introduces a significant saying of Jesus, in this case, one about his prophetic character. Luke records this important word on Jesus’ lips only six times, all in critical locations: here; in the parable about alertness when the Lord returns from the wedding feast (12:37); in his statement about receiving the kingdom as a small child (18:17); in response to Peter about leaving everything for the kingdom of God (18:29); in the final words of Jesus before the passion begins about the signs of the kingdom’s coming (21:32); and in the words to the thief on the cross that today he will be with Jesus in paradise (23:43). (CC)

I say to you – λέγω ὑμῖν—This will be repeated again in 4:25. These two references here in the Nazareth sermon are the first of numerous “I say to you” statements, in which Jesus speaks authoritatively as the enfleshed Word of God. Oftentimes, they are concentrated in a single discourse (see Lk 12:1–13:9 where it is used ten times). In Luke, this expression is often spoken by Jesus. (CC p. 191)

no prophet is acceptable in his hometown – This is similar to a saying we have today, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” (CBS)

The fact that a prophet is not able to be received by his own is corroborated by two illustrations from the OT. Elijah and Elisha were well known for their preaching and miracles. But at critical times they received no welcome in Israel. And so God sent Elijah to the (Gentile) widow of Zarephath and let the (Syrian) leper Naaman be cleansed by Elisha. The Gentile mission is anticipated already in Jesus’ first service! (CC pp. 195-196)

4:26–27 Mention of Jesus’ reference to God’s helping two non-Israelites (1Ki 17:1–15; 2Ki 5:1–14) reflects Luke’s special concern for the Gentiles. Jesus’ point was that when Israel rejected

God's messenger of redemption, God sent him to the Gentiles—and so it will be again if they refuse to accept Jesus (see 10:13–15; Ro 9–11). (CSB)

Jesus combats Jewish unbelief by citing two OT examples of God's mercy shown to Gentiles. The stubborn unbelief of one portion of humanity does not cause God to cancel his Gospel promises; he simply turns elsewhere. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

4:26 *Sidon*. One of the oldest Phoenician cities, 20 miles north of Tyre. Jesus later healed a Gentile woman's daughter in this region (Mt 15:21–28). (CSB)

4:28 *filled with wrath*. Because of Jesus' condemnation of Israel and favorable attitude toward Gentiles. (CSB)

ἐπλήσθησαν πάντες θυμού—πληρώω in the passive is followed by the genitive of the thing filled with (BAGD 1 b). The sense is that anger has taken control of them (cf. Acts 13:52; also 5:3). (CC)

The people of Nazareth understood well what he said in this second part. No longer confused, they are not filled with anger – anger that he will not be the Messiah they want. (This same anger is focused on prophetic and apostolic bearers of the Word.) (CC p. 196)

4:29 *throw him down the cliff* – In addition to the violence of the fall, the people might have also planned to stone Jesus. (TLSB)

4:30 *passing through their midst*. Luke does not explain whether the escape was miraculous or simply the result of Jesus' commanding presence. In any case, his time (to die) had not yet come (Jn 7:30). (CSB)

This attests to both Jesus' power and God's timing. The hour of His death had not yet come. (TLSB)

4:16–30 Jesus' ministry begins with victories over Satan and his minions, but also with an episode in Nazareth that foreshadows His rejection at the hands of His own people. Our lives typically include a similar mixture of successes and rejections. That is why we do well to focus more on the end of the Gospel story, for there we see resurrection, God's greatest victory over sin and the devil, and the revelation of His grace and mercy for us. • Eternal God, give me grace when I face temptations from the devil and assaults from the unbelieving world. Remind me that You have already overcome these things for me and even now are preparing a place for me in Your eternal presence. Amen. (TLSB)