

Text: Nehemiah 8:1-3,5-6,8-10; Psalm 19;  
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21  
Title: "One in the Spirit"

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Sunday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Madison, WI

Please pray with me, Lord, as we gather before your Word given us, we'd like to hear with understanding. We ask for our attentive ears to grasp the power of your Holy Spirit in us. In the words read and proclaimed, make these words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts acceptable to you, O God, our Creator, our Rock, our Redeemer, our Sustainer. **AMEN.**

These readings of God's Word to us today are rich in their hearing and in their meaning. It is, I think, a good day for us to affirm our faith in God, our belief in Jesus' teachings, and especially in the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Truly, we find that we are mining some real 'gems' to live by in what we hear and discover in our scriptures.

In the workings of the Holy Spirit, I am not going to introduce myself today as 'Sandy Strolling' in our sanctuary! Yet, I *am* going to ask you to think for a moment of your first recollection of being in church; I did this once many years ago in my first small congregation, strolling the aisle,(s) and gave them a chance to listen to each other AND for me to hear their 'Spirit' story to share with others gathered---it can be when you were little in Sunday School, singing in the youth choir, an altar boy being raised as a Roman Catholic (like my father!), in a Christmas play when you were an angel or a sheep, perhaps. Then, I want you to think of any *one* gift that you have received from God; perhaps long time(s) ago, or even recently!

After claiming these thoughts, stories, I bet that some of us have different gifts, different talents than what we may share with one another when we are at church worshipping together or at fellowship.....do you think?

Maybe, just maybe, someone 'discovers' us at church in having a very special talent: as a handy-man (person for Building/Grounds!), or with numbers (like for being treasurer!), a personal shopping wiz ( for others not getting out), or a great listener, or 'the best cook' in making pies, cookies or soups/chili, and none of us knew it 'til they brought it to a fellowship time or a lunch or funeral reception here, or the last 'potluck' we had together.

I have experienced here and with other churches where we Presbyterians take pride in being immensely hospitable! Jesus taught hospitality often in the crowds and elsewhere!

I believe that in our hospitality with each other, whether in/after worship or elsewhere, we are sharing our own story---about ourselves. In doing so, we state who we are (present), perhaps where we've been (past), and what we want/think to happen (future).

That's exactly what Jesus did in our text in Luke when he began his ministry; he stated who he was (came, sent by the Holy Spirit), and where he came from (Galilee), then claimed what he'd do, or his purpose (ie..bring Good News to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recover sight to the blind, let the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor).

Yes, Jesus did sprinkle in here the O.T. prophet words from Isaiah (Isaiah 58:6, 61:1-2, and Leviticus 25:8-12); Jesus was the messenger bringing the message; he wanted his listeners to hear him! He especially wanted them to follow his mission; this Luke text today (Ch. 4) is a mission statement for Jesus!

Two people who were/are 'filled with' this 'Spirit' we are talking about, many have heard recently; one who just went to his eternal life, Bob Uecker. The other is practicing in ministry out in our Capitol, Washington D.C, Rev. Mariann Budde. They both have used words in their vocation, like Jesus, that we listen to---one a radio play-by-play announcer here in WI for the Milwaukee Brewer's baseball team, and the other is a minister, recently appealing, in a message, to our new president, post-inauguration at the National Cathedral.

'Mr. Baseball,' as he was called, broadcast for over a half-century, and his family announced at his death, at 90 years of age, this last week, (quote)"Even in the face of his (health) challenges, his enthusiasm for life was always present, never allowing his spirit to falter."(unquote) (WSJ, "Voice of Generations-'Mr. Baseball' was a WI treasure",p.7, 01/17/25) His iconic voice was heard since the 1950s with the Braves and then Brewers, and I'll never forget his, ..."it's up, it's up, it's outta here" proclamation for every homerun hit from the park where he was a broadcaster! As a jokester, he was unmatched in the baseball arena!

The Right Rev. Mariann Budde is bishop of the Diocese of Washington, and she said powerful words of believing, (quote)"we can disagree respectfully and put our ideas out there and continue to stand for the convictions we've been given without resorting to violence of speech." (unquote) (AP Religion, "Episcopal Bishop says she'll continue to pray for....", 01/24/25)

In Jesus' early ministry, he was definitely part of community; he read the scroll/scripture, he was in the synagogue, on the Sabbath, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit! We recognize that Jesus was not any lonesome 'ranger' or 'stranger' in his actions/practices. It seems there is continuity of what God has planned from creation for us and how Jesus fulfills God's plan in new and different ways.

Don't you and I hear in public places and in our churches about our activities—together and individually; how are we 'church?' We talk, you and I, about seeing each other at church regularly, at book group, circle, choir practice, committee planned meetings, and yet those visiting on the Sabbath *anywhere* seems less and less each week---folks, it's reality!

And isn't it also noticeable for those of us who worship that our texts connect *so well*, week after week, with what is happening in the church and world? This time of year most of us are nominating someone, accepting, or installing new officers for their service in the church? The church calendar predicts it!

As we discern and learn from our texts today, we can't help but think that they demand our attention to what the Spirit brings to us in our own gifts of time, talent, treasures, and *not* to 'give up' or 'give in' to the values of others in discarding what we can't use (the four 's'—scroll, synagogue, Sabbath, and Spirit) or don't want in our lives. Yes, our Christian values matter to us!

The words we hear from Paul to Corinth are appropriate to remind us of the gifts we have received from God through the power of the Holy Spirit. He says, "Strive for greater gifts. And I will show you a more excellent way." Truly, Paul is proposing members of the body of Christ, the church, as being many, but being in unity as well. (he uses the word 'body' nineteen times (NRSV translation) and more than a couple-dozen times in all his letters---an indication that the body as the church is an important image to him).

Paul stresses a very important point---in the diversity of our bodies, we are directed by Christ to be the body, the church, physically; our bodies spiritually are what is the 'life' of the church---its work. The clincher is in respecting our wholeness *and* the wholeness of other members of the body. We need body parts—eyes, ears, nose, hands, and feet to function in our togetherness.

Jesus says, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' Do we, you and I, do we really have the ears and eyes to hear and see and obey? That is where God's faithfulness to us never waives. As Jesus knew the value in trusting in the Spirit in his ministry, given to him by God, he was not alone but with all in the community. Our trust and faith in others is God's Spirit working within us.

The good news for us in the gospel is that our faith, trust, and love in coming together and in sharing those inward, invisible thoughts about ourselves, our values, we as a community are led by Jesus Christ. We are sustained by our human wholeness. The virtues and values that we witness by being with each other are the greater gifts in life in which we strive. It is with this 'one in the Spirit' action in us, our faith, and beliefs, that the church is the body of Christ in the world in which we live.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.