

24-26 But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

*"Greater honour" — people with spiritual gifts that stand out to others, do not need extra honour.*

*"Equal concern" — when all the gifts are working together, there will be a mutual concern that will prevent division.*

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

*"The body" — Each individual, in each congregation and every expression of Trinitarian church is part of Christ's body on earth.*

28-30 And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all

**IN PRACTICE** Paul's teaching, arising from tensions in the church in Corinth, makes the assumption that spiritual gifts are part of the life of the church but must be balanced and free from competition or jealousy. Those who lead in giftedness, in breaking new ground, proclaiming, explaining, or in one-to-one personal ministry, are recognised as the ones who equip the congregation.

There is a tension between our desire for predictability - this is "our synagogue" or this is "our church" - and God doing something unpredictable, like Jesus' message at Nazareth or Holy Spirit-led ministry at Corinth.

God knows our needs, meets us with love, and wants to walk over the bridge of our faith, to work in our lives and community. Will we learn to let Him?

**QUESTION** *Does the Lord need to remind His church of the centrality of His word again? What would Paul write to our church about practising spiritual gifts and Spirit-led ministry?*

**PRAYER** In your own words, thank God for His lifegiving, encouraging and at times correcting word. And for the people-gifts in the church who help bring that word.

teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

*"God has placed in the church" — earlier, different spiritual gifts were discussed but now, people with a specific and established kind of ministry gifting are in view. Paul teaches that 'showy' and less showy gifts are of equal value. When it comes to gift ministries there is a certain order, not of value but in function, because of how they edify the church. Not all are the first-to-act pioneers who go out and plant churches, but without them there would be no churches. Not all are commissioned to speak a word from God and shape the church's vision, but those that are should be recognised in their calling without any jealousy. Similarly with those who instruct others in the faith, or take risks in exercising faith for the miraculous.*

31 Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

*"Greater gifts" — emphasising the gift of God's unconditional love, given to us to give away. This verse headlines 1 Cor. 13, which is where chapter 12 is going. All gifts are empty gestures unless motivated by God's love.*

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **January 27** in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: **Proclaiming, teaching and receiving the word which reveals God**

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 – Ezra reads the Law to the assembled people

Luke 4:14-21 – Jesus reads the Scripture which defines His call

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a – The ministry of Word and Spirit in Christ's church

Also: Psalm 19

## Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 – Ezra reads the Law to the people

### **Scripture brings both conviction and joy**

1 All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

*"Water Gate" — south of the Temple with open space*

*"Bring out the Law" — the first five books, probably emphasising Deuteronomy.*

2-3 So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

*"Seventh month" — The people assembled for the Festival of Trumpets, Leviticus 23:24-25 at the beginning of the new year, October 1, 445 BC*

5-6 Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen!"

Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

*"Opened the book... the people... stood... and... lifted their hands" — unrolling the scroll and reading God's word was worship of God.*

8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

*"Giving the meaning" — articulate exposition of the Hebrew Scriptures for the Aramaic-speaking people, brought up in Babylon.*

9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

*"Weeping as they listened" — the word of God, brought worshipfully, brought conviction, Ezra 10:6; Isa. 57:18-19; Jer. 31:13; Ezra 3:13. They were becoming painfully aware of their ancestors' failure before God. However, the New Year festival recalled with joy what God had done for them, Numbers 29:1-6.*

10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send

some to those who have nothing prepared. *"The joy... is your strength" — as the people, This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, rejoicing, received the presence of God afresh, He for the joy of the LORD is your strength." would show Himself strong for them.*

**IN PRACTICE** The Holy Spirit is active in the Old Testament but He is seldom highlighted until later, but he is certainly active in this public reading of Scripture which leads to a profound revelation and repentance among the people. The Law, their heritage as the people of God, had been missing from their lives. They could now see how their ancestors had become independent from God (a good definition of sin), had dismissed warning after warning from God's prophets, and the cause-and-effect of the exile which was their experience. Scripture is God's words of instruction, and also God's "now" word of direction as the Holy Spirit makes a deep connection with us. The hearers came to repentance before God, not for what they had done, but for others who had gone before, which teaches us that we can make the same response. Joy and strength arise through repentance, because God is love, and His very nature is mercy. What He wants most is to give us a second chance – and for us to do what connects us to this desire.

**QUESTION** *The people, hearing the law, were aware of how badly the nation had failed. What touches God's heart to turn their weeping to rejoicing?*

### Luke 4:14-21 – Jesus reads the Scripture which defines His call

14-15 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised Him.

*"Returned... in the power of the Spirit" — Jesus steps up into his public ministry, following baptism and visible encounter with the Holy Spirit.*

*"Teaching in their synagogues" — in Galilee, including Capernaum. Luke highlights what happened at Nazareth. Jesus' followers start to see Him as Messiah; others start to challenge His authority.*

16-17 He went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, as was His custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written:

*"The scroll... was handed to Him" — synagogue worship followed a pattern which included a set reading from the law (early books), and a reading from one of the prophets (later books), with an exposition which tied both together. Jesus is*

*handed the scroll for Isaiah 61, to be read in Hebrew and paraphrased in the more familiar Aramaic.*

18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

*"Set the oppressed free" — all five phrases speak about those who are marginalised in society, and "poor", "prisoner", "blind" etc carry both material and spiritual meanings.*

20-21 Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

*"Scripture is fulfilled" — gracious words, they said, from "Joseph's son" until Jesus, in His exposition, vv. 22-29, dared to apply the good news for non-Jews. Then they became angry.*

**IN PRACTICE** Here is a reading of Scripture on a different occasion but with similar deep impact, as Jesus unrolls the scroll to Isaiah 61 and reads the opening words as His personal commission. He had attended the Nazareth synagogue countless times as He grew up. Now, following his encounter with the Spirit of God at the riverside in baptism, He reads and speaks with a different tone and greater authority. What He tells them is true, but it is difficult for them, knowing Him as the carpenter who grew up with Joseph and Mary and siblings. Even more shocking was His explanation that the good news was proclaimed for all – for non-Jews as well. Judaism was never intended to be a 'closed shop' and neither is the Christian church which particularly exists for the benefit of others. Jesus' hearers quickly forgot the heavenly authority of His teaching and became angry. The word of God, proclaimed with the Spirit of God, is powerful both to save – and to convict.

**QUESTION** *In what ways are we bound up, unable to see properly, feeling bad about ourselves and lacking God's joy in our lives? How does encountering Jesus change us?*

### 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a – The ministry of Word and Spirit in church

**They work in concert in His body, diverse but one**

12-14 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

*"One body" — Paul assumes the Corinthians know that they together form Christ's body.*

*"Many parts" — Earlier Greek and Roman sources use the state as an analogy for many different members comprising one unified body.*

15 Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

*"If the foot should say" — orators of this period often personified objects as speaking.*

18-20 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21-24 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment.

*"Parts... we treat with special honour" — the "parts that we think are less honourable" stay clothed however hot it gets.*

*"Eye cannot say to the hand" — the Corinthian church was overawed by the more demonstrative gifts, and Paul will single out the prayer and praise language of tongues as a gift to use wisely, not to show off spirituality, 1 Cor. 12:10, 27, 30.*