



**For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,  
For ever and ever.**

**Amen**

**Reading:**

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

New International Version

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> Nehemiah said, 'Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.'

**Hymn:**

**Hail to the Lord's anointed**

James Montgomery

**StF 228**

1. Hail to the Lord's Anointed,  
great David's greater Son!  
Hail, in the time appointed,  
his reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression,  
to set the captive free;  
to take away transgression,  
and rule in equity.

2. He comes with succour speedy  
to those who suffer wrong,  
to help the poor and needy,  
and bid the weak be strong;  
to give them songs for sighing,  
their darkness turn to light,  
whose souls, condemned and dying,  
were precious in his sight.

3. He shall come down like showers  
upon the fruitful earth,  
love, joy and hope, like flowers,  
spring in his path to birth;

before him on the mountains  
shall peace, the herald, go;  
and righteousness in fountains  
from hill to valley flow.

4. Kings shall bow down before him,  
and gold and incense bring;  
all nations shall adore him,  
his praise all people sing;  
to him shall prayer cease  
and daily vows ascend;  
his kingdom still increasing,  
a kingdom without end.

5. O'er every foe victorious,  
he on his throne shall rest,  
from age to age more glorious,  
all blessing and all blest;  
the tide of time shall never  
his covenant remove;  
his Name shall stand for ever,  
his changeless Name of Love.

**Reading:****Luke 4: 14-21**

New International Version

<sup>14</sup> Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. <sup>15</sup> He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. <sup>16</sup> 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, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: <sup>18</sup> '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, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

**Message:**

Good News is what Jesus came to bring! Good News for the oppressed, the weak, the abandoned, the down-trodden, the poor, the homeless, the abused, the refugees.....of which he and his parents had experience. Good News of God's Kingdom, where all will find **Compassion, Love, Justice, Forgiveness and Hope!**

Good News is what Nehemiah was writing about. Educating, teaching, guiding and reminding the people of Jerusalem about the Law that God had given to their ancestors through Moses. It was not something with which to be threatened. God's Law, sets people free, free to serve one another and their loving, merciful God.

Psalm 19 tells us that God's Laws are sweeter than honey; a cause for delight, not about limiting our freedom, but setting us free to be more fully ourselves. When we love God with our whole selves and our neighbour as ourself, then we'll know the joy of the Lord.

So, returning to Nehemiah, it's about 100 years since Israel had returned from exile in Babylon. The Temple then the walls of Jerusalem were re-built. Now, the people needed to hear the word of God. They needed to hear from the Book of the Law.

What an amazing event it was. Everyone listening attentively to the Bible being read. A vast, hushed crowd watching as Ezra ascends a newly-built platform in the city square. As he opens the book, they stand up. They praise God, hands lifted high; then they bow down, faces in the dirt. Ezra the scribe begins to read.

His helpers circulate in the crowd, explaining and interpreting God's Word. The people listen attentively, and then... the sound of weeping is heard. But they were told to celebrate, and not weep.

The Law that Ezra was reading was very ancient, but that day marked something new. The Jews were becoming a people of the Book. They were being spiritually rebuilt, with material much stronger than the stones in their newly-built city wall.

The power of their kings had not saved them from being overrun by the Babylonians. Now they turned to a greater power, the power of the Word of God. They're moved to praise God, to weep over their sins, change their behaviour, make renewed promises to God.

About four hundred or so years later, Luke tells of Jesus reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, in his local synagogue, in Nazareth, at the very beginning of his ministry. After he's baptised he's filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and overcame the power of evil in the wilderness.

Much of the text which Jesus read, was from Isaiah 61: **"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 favour."**

This was Good News for all these people. But Jesus didn't just explain the prophetic text from Isaiah, he claimed that it was now fulfilled in him. He was saying the Good News is here because of him. He's speaking to people who are in need of new hope and promise. He's calling to his hearers to join a new community. The work of God's kingdom is about standing together and being involved, serving one another, in God's Kingdom of **Love, Compassion, Forgiveness, Justice and Hope.**

Good News Stories! The gospels are full of them. We should praise and thank God every day for the fact that those first witnesses to Jesus' work took the Good News to the world.

And now.....well, now it's up to us, isn't it? What are we going to do, you and me, together with Jesus, through the power of his Spirit? That's something that every generation in 2000 years has had to ask itself. Every group of Christians, every Christian community, of whatever denomination, has to find ways of spreading the Good News of Jesus.

We're in the middle of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Getting together with anyone has been restricted and difficult during these months of Covid limitations. But, the power of prayer isn't limited or restricted by anything. Our prayers for one another, and for our work, can reach our loving, compassionate God in every circumstance of life.

Psalm 19 tells us that God's Laws are sweeter than honey; a cause for delight, for freedom; setting us free to love God and our neighbour as ourself. Free to pray and discover God's plans for us. Free to take God's Good News where he shows us it's needed. Then we'll know the joy of the Lord.

God can use anyone to do his work. Our God is God of all the world, whether the world recognises him or not. Our vision of him is too small. We limit him.

We can tap into the Power of God through prayer and through reading our Bible. We can ask God to fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit so that, working together, we can make his love known. Amen

**Hymn: One human family God has made**

Rosemary Wakelin **StF 687**

1. One human family God has made,  
and all for each to care.  
One world, to be the home of all,  
With all its wealth to share.  
One Christ, to manifest on earth  
love's ultimate design.  
One Church to know the mystery  
of broken bread and wine.

2. One race, one world – yet torn apart,  
we spurn the way of love.  
But still ahead, the Christ leads on  
and calls the church to move  
from love of power to power of love,  
to give the world to all –  
to trust the love that conquered death,  
outside the city wall.

3. And are we brave enough to join  
with that great company –  
the cost not less than all we have  
and are or hope to be –  
the bitter cup of human sin  
to drink with him who died,  
and take his love outside the wall  
to all the crucified?

4. Claim him who claims us for his own,  
to share his pain and grief,  
to bear the scars that stamp us his –  
the hallmark of belief.  
As partners of the living Christ,  
who risk the path we trod,  
with wondering love we find we share  
the timeless joy of God.

**Prayers of Intercession:**

In the confidence of God's concern for the smallest detail of human living, we bring our prayers for the world and ourselves.

We pray for those who find themselves in despair today: people who have no sense of their own value, those who have no confidence in the future, those suffering from mental ill health. God of grace,

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who live with fear and longing: parents who have no food for their children, children who live in war zones and places of conflict, carers who long for a break and a rest. God of grace,

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whose thoughts are almost too much to bear: people living with guilt for the past, those living with a difficult health diagnosis, people living with the burden of grief. God of grace,

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray in silence for those for whom we have a particular concern.....  
God of grace,

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves. Help us to remember that we are your children: teach us to rely on your presence, teach us to replace hate with love, fear with knowledge, teach us to

care for others as you care for each one of us. Help us to share the Good News of Jesus with all we meet. God of grace,

**Hear our prayer.**

**Amen**

**Hymn**

**There's a spirit in the air**

Brian Wren

**StF 398**

1. There's a spirit in the air,  
telling Christians everywhere:  
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working in our world!'
2. Lose your shyness, find your tongue;  
tell the world what God has done:  
God in Christ has come to stay,  
living, working, in our world!
3. When believers break the bread,  
when a hungry child is fed,  
praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working, in our world.
4. Still the Spirit gives us light,  
seeing wrong and setting right:  
God in Christ has come to stay.  
Live tomorrow's life today!

5. When a stranger's not alone,  
where the homeless find a home,  
praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working, in our world.
6. May the Spirit fill our praise,  
guide our thoughts and change our  
ways  
God in Christ has come to stay.  
Live tomorrow's life today.
7. There's a Spirit in the air,  
calling people everywhere:  
praise the love that Christ revealed,  
living, working, in our world.

**Blessing:**

May the grace of Christ redeem you, the power of Christ renew you, the example of Christ inspire you and the love of Christ shine from you.

Go in faith, to walk his way and make his love known, to his glory.

**Amen.**