

THE EMMAUS SERIES

3rd Sunday Year C

Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-19

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen

Today's gospel reading begins with Luke's famous account of the care with which he has researched the traditions of the first Christian communities; it then omits the account of Christ's infancy, his baptism by John, and his forty days in the wilderness (which feature elsewhere in the year's liturgies); and it continues with a text describing the beginnings of Jesus' ministry, preaching the Kingdom of God in Galilee. Adopting the pattern established by Mark before him, Luke has the ministry in Galilee leading into the courageous journey of Jesus towards Jerusalem to meet his fate, as he prepares his disciples for what lies ahead.

The teaching of Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth, concerning his fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, and Luke's emphasis upon the traditions of the community, remind us that the world's great religious traditions venerate the writings and teachings that put them in touch with their past. A healthy community keeps alive the memory of what inspired its origins. The first reading from the chronicles of Nehemiah describes a moving moment in the reestablishment of the Jerusalem community, after return from the Exile. The common people, ignorant now of Israel's traditions, are overwhelmed with concern when Ezra, the scribe, reads and explains for them the long neglected Book of the Law. They are reassured, however, being told that the joy brought by renewed observance of old Israel's traditions will be their 'stronghold'. How much more grateful and responsive should we be, as today's renewal makes available to us the far superior treasures of the New Testament!

Luke tells his readers that the gospel he is introducing is a faithful expression of the faith that has been handed on in the community (a common theme of New Testament writers, see, 1 Cor 15:1-11 etc), handed on by 'those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word'; his investigations confirm as 'well founded' the teachings they are familiar with. Prior to the writing of the four gospels that have become the heart of the New Testament, the bulk of the material they were to use was circulating in the many small stories told of Jesus by those who were spreading the Good News. Our four gospels put that material together within the time line of a continuous story leading to the passion, death and resurrection of the Saviour. As they make use of this material, each of the four brings out themes that are dear to them and the communities they belong to. In his gospel, Luke – a well educated, gentile convert, conscious of the needs of his fellow converts – reveals himself as a warm hearted and sensitive interpreter of the faith, bringing out such themes as: the joy of believing, the blessings found in prayer, the central role of the Spirit in our Christian lives, the important place of women in the public life of Jesus, and the privileged place the poor of the world have in the designs of God.

The climax of today's gospel, of course, is the claim of Jesus that he brings 'fulfilment' to the splendid hopes of old Israel. The Christian Church is following the example of Jesus himself, as it treasures the traditions in which the faith of God's people has been expressed.

John Thornhill sm