

## “Holy remembering”

January 24, 2010

Text: *Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10, Luke 4:14-21*

### I.

In a book entitled, *Living Toward a Vision*, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann notes that ...

*The central vision of world history in the Bible is that all of creation is one, every creature ... living in harmony ....*

Towards this end, a major theme in the Bible is the theme of covenant—where we’re exhorted, even commanded by God, to uphold the covenants, which are the fundamental guidelines and commitments for faithful relationship to God and to our fellow human beings.

Out of this backdrop, *remembering the covenants* emerges as a primary biblical theme throughout the entire Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. In all of this, *remembering the covenants* and *remembering our commitments to these covenants* becomes for us a **holy remembering**.

**Holy remembering** is not just a matter of faith affirmation, it’s a matter of survival.

When we remember the covenants, when we remember who we are in relation to God and in relation to one another, when we remember that all of creation is one and that the goal of life is to live in harmony with all peoples, LIFE is honored. And along the way, our lives go better; and all around there are more smiles and there’s great joy in heaven.

### II.

In both of our scripture readings this morning, there is a public reading of the Scriptures. And in each instance, the response to the hearing of the Word, is a **holy remembering**; not necessarily with the same result, but a **holy remembering** nonetheless.

The reading from **Nehemiah 8**, takes place during the historical period known as the **Restoration**, the time after some fifty years in Babylonian Exile when many of the Israelites returned to Judah and to Jerusalem, the holy city.

What’s special about this Nehemiah reading is that, most likely, the Israelites hadn’t heard the scriptures read for years—decades, even. In Babylon, as far as we know, the scriptures were unavailable. Their whereabouts was uncertain. In any event, there hadn’t been a public reading of the scriptures—of the Torah, the Laws of Moses—for longer than people could remember.

But now, in this 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Nehemiah, the people are gathered—probably in Jerusalem—to hear the reading of the Holy Scriptures. We can only imagine the emotion of the event. Most of the people, no doubt, didn't know how to read.

But here they are ... and the priest Ezra, standing high above them on a platform of some sort, brings out portions of the Torah to read to the people. As he opens the book in preparation to read, immediately, all the people stand up. And Ezra, the holy priest, reads from the book from early morning until midday, as the book of Nehemiah relates.

Wow! What a sacred event, what a ***holy remembering*** for the gathered assembly. Apparently, many in attendance that day were moved to tears, so touched they were to hear the Word of the Lord.

Our ***holy remembering***, friends, helps keep us on track. It helps remind us who we are ... and what are our most basic, fundamental commitments and values.

### III.

This same ***holy remembering*** happens also in our reading from **Luke 4**. This is in the initial period of Jesus' ministry, in Galilee, when he was teaching in the synagogues and was well received by the people.

As **Luke** tells it, when he got to Nazareth, Jesus' home town, he went into the synagogue, as was his custom; and when he stood up to read, the scroll of the prophet **Isaiah** was handed to him. Unrolling the scroll, he began to read ... words which we've heard again and again through the years:

*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, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Then Jesus rolled the scroll up, gave it to the attendant and began to explain to the people:

*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*

Here, again, is a ***holy reminding*** of who we are as people of God, a ***holy remembering*** of our life-purpose as Christians. Unmistakably, as followers of Christ, we are to stand in solidarity with the poor. There's simply no other route to Christian discipleship.

Throughout the Bible, this preferential option for the poor is cited again and again. The implications are obvious. God expects us to do something to feed the hungry and lift up the lowly. How else can God's vision of unity and harmony be realized when the

inequalities of our human situation are so widespread?

#### IV.

**Holy remembering** invites us all to make God's vision of *all of creation being one* our life-purpose. That's why the mission emphasis in our church is so important. That's why our denomination, the *United Church of Christ*, takes the special annual offerings we do each year:

1. One Great Hour of Sharing
2. Neighbors in Need
3. Strengthen the Church
4. The Christmas Fund

All of these offerings help in some tangible way to level the playing field, to make for a more just and equitable society and world.

And now with the awful tragedy in Haiti, we are all challenged to reach out in support of our Haitian brothers and sisters. **Holy remembering** always tilts toward lifting up the poor and liberating the oppressed. Haiti, of course, remains the most impoverished nation in the Western Hemisphere.

I remember going to Haiti on a mission/outreach trip for ten days in 1981. It was a devastated nation then. From the massive deforestation that has destroyed all the top soil to the seemingly endless corruption and dysfunction of the government, Haiti has continued to dig deeper and deeper into a permanent nightmare.

Let's hope that one of the consequences of the current catastrophe is that, with all of the international attention drawn to the massive destruction and personal misery in Haiti, some well-conceived plan for re-construction is eventually set in place and that Haiti is set on a new course.

Let's hope that on the other side of the long night of darkness, a beam of new hope and possibility is shined forth.

#### V.

Today is CROP WALK recruitment Sunday in our church. The actual WALK, which has been an annual event in our church each of the ten years that I've been here, is on Sunday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, four weeks from today.

With all the needs in the world today—amidst all of the disaster relief efforts going on with thousands of displaced persons from wars and ethnic strife around the globe, we are all challenged to do everything we can to meet the mounting need. There are literally

hundreds of CROP WALKS each year around the country, coordinated under the auspices of **Church World Services**.

Again, **Church World Services** is the mission/ outreach conduit for the United Church of Christ. It's an ecumenical, faith-based organization. It's through them that our relief donations for Haiti are being channeled.

If we think about it, CROP WALK, as an event, is itself a **holy remembering**. In walking, we are remembering the ongoing importance of reaching out to the needy:

1. feeding the hungry,
2. providing shelter for the homeless and displaced,
3. lobbying on behalf of the sick and the infirmed and the countless millions without adequate Health Care.

Any time we seek a more just world, it is a **holy remembering**. Why? Because that's what our most sacred writings tell us to do.

When people in Miami Lakes observe us walking; indeed, when we see ourselves walking, we remember our calling as Christians, as human beings who share this planet. We remember God's vision that all of creation is one; that we are ONE planet and ONE people seeking to live together in harmony.

Our walking makes a difference. Not only do we raise between \$5,000 and \$7,000 dollars to help combat world hunger (25% of which comes back to our local community ... for us, it goes to the Family Center of the St. Andrews Lutheran Church in Hialeah), but we model for our children and youth our Christian values.

The Christian vision for life is not just about me ... or us ... or my family ... or my church ... or my city, state or nation. The Christian vision for life is a vision that includes every human being—again, that all creation is one.

Our CROP WALK is an intergenerational group of people from multiple ethnic groups, from a whole range of socio-economic backgrounds, coming together for a common purpose. That's a beautiful thing. Each of us, doing what we can to make things better.

## VI.

After worship today, we're asking you to sign up for CROP WALK 2010 over in Fellowship Hall.

- Members of our Board of Christian Outreach will be waiting for you, ready to sign you up.
- If you have children, sign your children up too. Events such as the CROP WALK are wonderful teaching events for our children and youth.

CROP WALK is a remembering of who we are as Christians ... of what we are called to as children of the ONE God who is Creator and Redeemer of us all.

And so, let us who are gathered here this morning hear Jesus' reading of the prophet Isaiah with fresh ears and eager spirits.

And let *the Spirit of the Lord* be upon us ...  
And let us be *anointed to bring good news to the poor and liberation to the oppressed* ...

Let us be *anointed* to stand in solidarity with the victims of the earth: the hungry, the destitute, the forgotten ones, the little ones.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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