

**Those Who Have Ears ~ January 24, 2010**  
**Nehemiah 8:1-2, 5-6, 8-10; I Corinthians 12:13-31; Luke 4:14-21**

Do any of you here remember Ross Perot? Or, really, H. Ross Perot? He ran for president in 1992 and 1996. He was and is a Texas billionaire who had some pretty good ideas for governing the country. His running mate in 1992 was James Stockdale, lest we forget. If you recall Ross at all, you will remember that he was a small man with very large ears. During his campaign, at one point, he said, "I'm all ears." He meant that he would listen to the ideas of others if he was elected president. Of course, because of the size of his ears, his comment became an over-used joke.

It's a beautiful thing when people listen so intently to one another that they are "all ears." It is a compliment to the speaker to know that he or she is being heard. Most often in our closest relationships we don't always take the time to truly listen to another person. This can lead to misunderstanding and a lack of sense about "what's up." It's important that we focus on things that are vital to our lives. Jesus did say, "Those who have ears, will hear and understand."

As the book of the law was read to the crowd gathered before the Water Gate, everyone was listening with great passion. All those who could hear and understand, men and women, had gathered to listen to Ezra. They had returned from exile and the re-establishment of their nation was at hand. The wall around Jerusalem had been rebuilt closing the world out and ensuring that there would be no mingling between the people inside and those outside. This was to make certain that the purity of their religion would be maintained. During the years in exile there had been a lot of intermarriage and a loss of the traditions of their faith. This was of great concern to Nehemiah and Ezra. So much so, that many of those marriages were set aside—if a husband or wife was not Jewish, he or she was not welcome.

The people wept when the law was read to them and when they fully grasped how they had disobeyed God in the past. They were encouraged to move forward beyond their weeping into the celebration of the new moon festival, as they started over once again.

When those gathered in the synagogue in Nazareth heard Jesus tell them he was the fulfillment of prophecy, the one they had been waiting for, they all spoke well of him. Usually guests were invited to read the scriptures when they appeared in the synagogue.

Perhaps, in hearing him they recognized a new voice, one which might shine new light onto their scriptures and their faith. They had ears that could hear and understand and would share what they learned from him with other members of their community of faith.

As we will learn next week, their enchantment with him was brief.

Now, ears are vital in any community of faith but they are not all that compose it. Paul wrote of the importance of every part of the body of Christ. He noted that everyone is vital to the survival of our faith. For Paul, as for Jesus, there was no wall to be built to isolate the followers of the new way from the rest of the world. People who believed in the teachings of Jesus were called to move out into the world and share what they had

heard and what they understood with others. This was the only way to keep this new interpretation of the word of God alive.

But first of all, they needed to understand, that, while each of them was important and unique, they were all to unite for the well-being of the whole body. Paul was telling them, there is no “I” in “team.” He knew that to have a well-functioning organization of any kind, everyone must discover their special role and then willingly contribute their effort to the goals of all.

What was true for those early believers is no less true for us. We are in difficult times in our world—many distractions pull us in different directions and it is hard to focus on where it is we should be going. Through the years religion and the church have slipped from places of honor and respect for many. Communities schedule sports programs for our children and meetings for our grown-ups on Sunday mornings. Everything else comes before spending an hour in the presence of God renewing and recharging our selves. If we believe that church and God have any importance in our lives we must be the agents of change.

When I told our Confirmation Class that in the “Dark Ages” of my youth all stores and businesses were closed on Sundays, I suspect they did not believe me. But, they were, and Sundays were the one day of the week when the focus was on church and family. While I would not want to return completely to those “good old days,” I often wonder why, when there are 168 hours in each week, one cannot be spent in the presence of God and with other members of a faith community. The community misses the foot or head or hand or ear or eye or voice that decides not to be present. It simply does not function as well as it should when all parts are not gathered for the fellowship involved in just being together and supporting one another. We draw our strength and our direction from one another. This helps us, when we hear the call of God urging us to serve in the world, to move forward in the manner of Jesus and of those early followers. We move forward with a knowledge of what our faith requires of us, if we expose ourselves to our scriptures and our faith traditions.

The Israelites were moved to tears upon hearing the words of their faith read to them. They understood their failings and they grasped the need to start over to make things right with God. Jesus read those words of faith to people he encountered in the synagogues as he moved from town to town—he knew it was important that they were grounded in an understanding of what it was God asked of them. We, too, no matter what way we may serve in our own community of faith, are linked together by the words we hear in song and scripture in this place. They arm us and ensure that when God calls us into service, we will be ready.

*- Amen*