

The Mission of Christ and Our Call to Action

Third Sunday of Epiphany, 26 January 2025

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

As we reflect on today's readings, the Gospel of Luke invites us to immerse ourselves in the very heart of Christ's mission—a mission deeply rooted in proclaiming good news, setting captives free, and uplifting the marginalized. Modesty aside, this Gospel resonates deeply with my journey. It reflects the reason why my ordinations to the diaconate, priesthood, and bishopric all took place on the Feast of St. Luke, making me a Lukan. The Gospel's powerful call to embody Christ's liberating and transformative ministry continues to inspire and guide my Christian living.

In today's Gospel (Luke 4:14-21), Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, declaring that "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." He outlines a mission centered on the poor, the oppressed, and those in need of healing and liberation. This is the social Gospel—a message that challenges systems of injustice and compels us to act with compassion and courage. Christ's mission is not confined to individual spirituality but extends to transforming society and restoring dignity to those who have been marginalized. Luke's Gospel emphasizes that this mission is not optional for the church; it is central to our identity. To follow Christ means to participate in this ministry of liberation and care. It calls us to examine how we, as individuals and as a community, can bring hope and healing to those who are suffering.

The readings from Nehemiah and Psalm 19 amplify this message. In Nehemiah 8, we hear the exhortation to celebrate the joy of the Lord and share with those who have nothing. This highlights the communal nature of our faith—a faith that finds joy not only in worship but also in acts of generosity and solidarity. Psalm 19, with its prayer for the psalmist's "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer," reminds us of the need for integrity in our ministry. Our actions must align with Christ's message of justice, mercy, and compassion, ensuring that we embody the Gospel in both word and deed.

This week, I am reminded of Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde's call for mercy and compassion during the U.S. National Day of Prayer. Her appeal to President Donald Trump, which sought to direct attention to the vulnerable and marginalized, received varied criticisms. Some accused her of politicizing the event, while others unfairly labeled her as a partisan voice in the Israel-

Palestine conflict. Yet her message reflects the complexities that many church leaders navigate in addressing global issues. Rather than remaining silent, Bishop Budde chose to amplify the Gospel's social message, challenging those in power to act with mercy. In doing so, she embodied the prophetic voice of the church—speaking truth to power, advocating for justice, and calling for peace, even in the face of criticism. Such moments remind us that the church's prophetic role is often uncomfortable. Yet, it is in this discomfort that we find the strength to persist, knowing we are following Christ's example.

Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us that every part of the body of Christ has a role to play. Each of us is uniquely gifted, and together we form a whole that can embody Christ's mission. In our chaplaincy, we see this lived out in the many ministries that allow us to serve and support one another. We need volunteers for the Kleiderkammer, teachers and helpers for our German language classes, and for journeying with the refugees as a whole. We need readers during Sunday services. You can join our welcome team, coffee team, or the choir. You can help prepare in the vestry, serve as an altar server, or assist in the communication team, including managing the online service. You might be called to support the children's and teens' ministry, participate in the safeguarding team, navigate Stuttgart's ecumenical world, or even stand for council membership. There are countless opportunities to contribute. I invite you to prayerfully consider where God may be calling you to serve in our chaplaincy. How might your gifts bring good news, healing, and hope to those around us?

As we end this reflection, let us remember that Christ's mission, as proclaimed in Luke, is not merely a story of the past but a call to action today. Let us celebrate the joy of the Lord, align our hearts with His Word, and offer our hands and feet in service. In doing so, we embody the social Gospel, living out the transformative love and justice that Christ came to proclaim. May we each find our place in this mission and, together as one body, carry forward the work of the Gospel in our church and beyond.