

**1.23.22 –Epiphany 3**  
**“In the Beginning, Jesus Taught”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Psalm 19:1-14 (HCSB) ~ Pam**

*The Witness of Creation and Scripture - For the choir director. A Davidic psalm.*

<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky proclaims the work of His hands.

<sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour out speech;  
night after night they communicate knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> There is no speech; there are no words;  
their voice is not heard.

<sup>4</sup> Their message has gone out to all the earth,  
and their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens He has pitched a tent for the sun.

<sup>5</sup> It is like a groom coming from the bridal chamber;  
it rejoices like an athlete running a course.

<sup>6</sup> It rises from one end of the heavens  
and circles to their other end;  
nothing is hidden from its heat.

<sup>7</sup> The instruction of the Lord is perfect,  
renewing one’s life;  
the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy,  
making the inexperienced wise.

<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the Lord are right,  
making the heart glad;  
the command of the Lord is radiant,  
making the eyes light up.

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring forever;  
the ordinances of the Lord are reliable  
and altogether righteous.

<sup>10</sup> They are more desirable than gold—  
than an abundance of pure gold;  
and sweeter than honey,  
which comes from the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup> In addition, Your servant is warned by them;  
there is great reward in keeping them.

<sup>12</sup> Who perceives his unintentional sins?  
Cleanse me from my hidden faults.

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, keep Your servant from willful sins;  
do not let them rule over me.  
Then I will be innocent  
and cleansed from blatant rebellion.

<sup>14</sup> May the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to You,  
Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.

**L: These are the Perfect Words of God!** C: Thanks be to God.

**Luke 4:14-21 (NRSV) ~ Pam**

*The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry*

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup> He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

*The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth*

<sup>16</sup> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> “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,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

**L: These are the words of God!** C: Thanks be to God.

**Please pray with me:**

Dear Lord, we gather on this frigid day to be in your presence and to receive instruction. Thank you for the warmth of the building and the warmth from each other. Let us remember the beauty of recently fallen snow and the precious gift of life itself. Open your words to us in both beauty and wisdom. May those not with us today feel your presence and assurance wherever they are. Lord, speak now through your messenger. **“Amen.”**

---

I missed you last week! It is good to be back in this house of the Lord. Thank you to **all** who welcomed Chaplain Anne Smith and made her feel welcomed to our pulpit. It was a renewing time off. Jesus’ own example of taking sabbath rest and quiet times with God was restorative and is a good example to us.

Today's psalm is probably familiar to you either from readings or from music, and in either case, it reminded me of the creation passages in Genesis, declaring God's work each day was good. The psalm is made up of two praise hymns—one praising creation and one praising the law. David was moved by God's handiwork in both. The heavenly constellations seen at night, the clear and expansive skies, the bright life-giving sun of the days show how powerful God is and how he can defeat any pagan deities (even the sun gods) at any time. Likewise, David explains that God's law, the Torah (first five books of our Bible), like the creation, is perfect to revive the soul and to bring wisdom if followed. The poet believes that even joy will result if one meditates on God's law both day and night, following God's commands. David had no fear of the law yet needed the law to keep him pure. The law at this time warned man of sin; although written before his well-known adultery, David prayed for his own cleansing and redemption from willful or rebellious sin. He must have realized a vulnerability and so praised God in verses 7-13 for the joy that a clear conscience and clean, pure heart could give.

“Pure as the driven snow.” Have you heard that phrase from 19<sup>th</sup> Century literature? It means clean, white, drifted, untrodden snow; and we have had our share. Has it been a long time since you walked in the quiet of new fallen snow? Or do we rush outside to shovel and plow, or do you stay indoors until it is safer to go out? I have memories of being a teen in the early 1970's when we had 4-6 inches of snow each year. My favorite thing was to go outside at night and walk in the snow in my small town neighborhood. It was so QUIET! No cars, plows, no shoveling or

sledding. Just crisp night air and white all around; I felt so close to God in that silence under the clear, frozen night skies.

David proclaims that in such a creation there is no need for speech. In the silence, speech is unnecessary to communicate with God. Words can never fully convey God's power or glory, so we must get quiet and listen. Turn off the radio, Spotify, Alexa, and the TV! Is silence difficult for you? In 2020, it was. We had too much solitude, isolation, and unwelcome news. 2021 was better but still noisy getting our vaccine appointments, re-gathering in person, or debating masks' efficacy. I propose that for 2022, we embrace two spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude, but from a new perspective. Build in scheduled times to meditate on God's word and to pray. Create appointments with God to just be silent and in His presence, just as we set appointments for the doctor or dentist. We will learn eight or more prayer tools where we are not just asking and talking to or at God, but we will be listening for God, for words FROM God.

“Listen for the Work” is our theme this year. We are no longer in an era of denominations telling churches what to do, what missions to support, or how best to share the Gospel with our community. We have the soul freedom to discern God's word and direction. As Baptists, we appreciate the opportunities to “associate” or collaborate on larger initiatives, yet we are autonomous as churches to find what suits our world and neighborhoods best now. We are commanded to go to the nations, teach the Gospel, and baptize new believers; and although our source pool has changed over generations, there are still people in need of

God and His Word. Like the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus' day, not all who need God will be open to his truth. But we must try.

Listening to our neighborhoods' needs takes interactions, as well as silence and observation. We must ask God to reveal our work to us, both the immediate and the future needs we are uniquely able to fill. Our Vision and Mission for the Gospel does not change; but how we fulfill them may. That part of discipleship growth is not up to me; this is our church and your diverse spiritual gifts along with God's direction will determine next steps. We may have to experiment, and that's ok! I will lead us through it if you commit to silence, Scripture, listening prayer, and obedience. We must live more like Jesus, especially in uncertain times.

When Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, they **loved** his message, and word spread about his teaching and healings. So he went to his hometown, Nazareth, and expected a warm reception. We read in Luke (earlier than in Matthew or Mark) that they permitted him to teach in the synagogue. The synagogue was like a community center, a place of fellowship and study; Jesus was well known. In the services, there would be 1.) worship through prayer; 2.) reading of the scriptures (Torah and prophecy) by seven congregants; and 3.) a teaching portion to interpret what was read. The president would invite a distinguished person to speak, and discussion followed. This is why Jesus taught. How Jesus taught that prophecy of his being the Messiah, and who would be saved did not go over so well.

They liked his words, wanted the miracles, but questioned his **authority**. The Pharisees doubted it was of God. Yet, Jesus never

doubted his Father. In the chapters before this and from Gospel of John, we know that Jesus was with God at the beginning of all time; Christ's birth was divine; at his baptism, God affirmed his sonship to witnesses; he was raised in a loving family, given skills to live on earth; and was tempted by Satan in the desert, yet prevailed by faith and obedience. By this reading, Jesus knew his authority was from God, and that he had a brief time to deliver the good news of salvation to the people of God, including the Gentiles. Let us begin our study of "Listening for the Work" with Jesus' same sense of urgency. "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Remember: Jesus Christ as Messiah and Teacher comes to **visible life for others through you and your actions!** Will you find time to be intentionally quiet and alone, so you may "Listen for the Work?" // **Let us pray,**

Dear Jesus, we love you, and thank you for being our guide in this beautiful creation with all our human shortcomings. Teach us to listen more; teach us to discern God's will through your Word. Let us spend more time with you in solitude and Scripture, listening for the Kingdom work you have for us to do. Please keep us healthy in all ways, so that we can continue to live out the Gospel and share it with others. In your name, we pray and abide, **Amen.**