“Nehemiah is one of the later books written [in the Old Testament.] And it covers some exciting times for the Israelites...

the time when they return from **exile**. When they learn to rebuild their relationship with God.

Joni Sancken in New Proclamation (Year C 2013 p89-90), believes we can learn from “Nehemiah, who though he writes in **challenging** times --- they are times laced with hope.

It may not be that much different from our situation today...would it be an exaggeration to say that we live in challenging times? Would it be a stretch to say we could all learn to rebuild our relationship with God?

At some time or another we all have left the good graces of God, or have been pushed into exile...away from God....

Maybe we were lost in our worldly affairs, consumed by anxiety, overcome with trouble.

Maybe...our hearts wandered from the center of God’s will. Though the Israelites did not wander as much as they were forcibly disconnected

God was always present for Israel --His chosen people in Old Testament times.

God is present for us - we are His chosen people of today!!! Jesus made us all children of God –heirs to the kingdom –when he opened his arms on the cross...and died for all people.

We are **cleansed, renewed and called by name.**

Through baptism, we realize we are no longer refugees but accepted and called home to rest in the arms of God Himself.

Through the holy water of baptism and God’s Word, the Holy Spirit descends upon us...forgives us and gives us purpose.

Luke writes 3 times in a short period that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. The presence of God settled in the body of Christ.

Our bodies, though merely flesh, from dust we came and to dust we shall return...we too are filled with the Holy Spirit.

We begin each day... a new person -- knowing we are God’s children.

Knowing we are forgiven offers us an opportunity to purposely look for places where we can see God...places to seek and save our relationship with God.

During this time after Epiphany we get to look more closely in places we had not thought to look before.

We get to hear Jesus speak, see Him unroll the scroll and speak those words of Isaiah...bringing to fulfillment the prophecy of a Savior.

A Savior who stands right in front of us...A Savior who looks us in the eye and speaks the Word of God...

A Savior who will help us rebuild a stronger rapport with God.

These Sundays after Epiphany make it the perfect time to see Christ in new places and in new ways!

 To really see Him! Whether we have a revelation, an epiphany...Whether we see Jesus for the first time or the thousandth time!

It is now the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany and though the colors on the altar have been changed back to green...we still hold on to the energy that Epiphany emits....even midst the ordinary.

Green, as you remember depicts ‘ordinary times’...which we celebrate June to November...those 230 some days represent our ordinary lives...which we might find mundane...

Like we live the same life ...day in and day out...

... at the same time we are reminded that the majority of Jesus’ time on this earth was spent doing every day things midst the people.

Jesus regularly went to church as was his custom; He pulled a chair up to the table with all kinds of people, He consistently found Himself midst fellowship and conversation.

He taught, healed and brought the glory of God into homes and hearts...and continues to do so today.

So you see these days are not really as ordinary as they are extraordinary.

It can be a little confusing to label these few Sundays as ordinary times -so soon after Christmas –

 it feels as if it’s just thrown in there... it feels as if we should not leave the true spirit of Epiphany.

this is the time to make sure we have our eyes and ears opened...

Epiphany...the best time...to sharpen our attention so I mix it up a little - the white and gold dossal cloth remain and the Christ candle will continue to be lit during the Sundays after Epiphany because we **cannot and we should not lose our focus.**

... this Christ candle has burned low... even gone out during worship and then it has to be refilled.

Likewise, we find ourselves at a point where we also, burn low or burn out...to the point we need to be refueled...filled up with the presence of Christ.

In the season of Epiphany we are called to open our eyes!!! To see Jesus - See Him standing here reading scripture *to us*. Knowing He will walk out those doors and stay beside us all week long.

When the Israelites gathered for worship, they listened, and by unloading their burdens they were moved by God’s presence.

 “Some were moved to tears as they acknowledged their sins...for others it was a new revelation that gave new meaning and direction,

 so powerful in fact that they responded to hearing the Word of God with both weeping and rejoicing.”

When we grasp the wonder of God’s Spirit settling upon us perhaps we too will have tears in our eyes knowing we do not deserve it but gladly accept it.

*We fall down, we lay our crowns at the feet of Jesus,*

 *the greatness of mercy and love at the feet of Jesus...*

*and we cry holy ho...****ly...*** *holy*

*we cry holy ho...****ly...*** *holy*

*we cry holy ho...****ly...*** *holy...is the lamb.*

“When we genuinely repent of all our sins and seek God’s forgiveness we can began to rebuild our lives in more positive ways both internally and externally.”

 The spirit will move us when we shed all our cares and concerns...when we acknowledge our need for God. When humbly bow before the cross...Our hearts will overflow with great adoration.

The windows, too, were left... filled with the many ways Christ was and is adored...because we cannot forget to whom our adoration belongs.

We open worship with a confession and forgiveness...so that we can prepare our hearts to purely rejoice and praise God and receive His unconditional love.

We say “*Alleluia.* Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. *Alleluia.”*

And we pray *“*Show Yourself to all the world through Him who is the true light and the bright morning star.”

All is forgiven and forgotten when we open our hearts to God.

David Lose writes in his column, In the Meantime, that maybe Jesus’ declaration that “the Scripture has been fulfilled” the word **today** means that it is just the beginning.”

“In the Greek the word **today** is

perfect tense meaning it is

ongoing, even repetitive,

and definitely re-occurring.

Jesus is saying, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled and

 continues to be fulfilled

and will keep being fulfilled and therefore will keep needing to be fulfilled **in your presence**.”

We just need to keep asking God...to change our hearts...

For He is the potter and we are the clay. Amen