

The Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan

THE BIBLICAL WILD

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Biblical Wild, pioneers in the Christian wilderness.

Today we are along the shores of Lake Huron at Trinity Episcopal Church in Lexington, Michigan, where we begin the first part of the two week consideration of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah provides an excellent example of the way in which Israel retold stories from its past to connect to the present and point toward the future. 587 BCE was a disastrous time for the people of Israel. They had been captured by the Babylonians, the temple had been destroyed, they were taken into exile, the Davidic monarchy had fallen, and Israel as a political reality was no more. These events necessitated a radical reassessment of how the people of Israel understood themselves in relationship to their God, and as a nation. How were they to understand what had happened to them? Was God going to remember the promises that had been made? Life was wide open for the Israelites and they had to reflect upon their experiences and come to some new understandings of their time in exile. They understood as they reflected theologically that they were under God's judgement. They had heard the prophetic warnings about their unrepentant behavior, their straying from the righteous path, and this clearly was God's judgement upon them. And so, hope was extinguished, and their looking toward the future was looking toward a dim and less than exciting, and certainly not a hope-filled future. But beginning about 150 years after the first wave of the exile, and continuing onto about the year 300 BCE, there began to be a notion of some initial fulfillment of hope. This once abandoned hope for them manifest itself in the idea that they would be able to return to their land and begin a reconstruction of the former glories of the past, and of who they were as the people of Israel. We see a people who are experiencing a second exodus, leaving their Babylonian captivity and moving back into their promise land, but focused on needing to rebuild all of their society. They needed to rebuild the temple, rebuild the walls, and rebuild their community. The first step in the people's return to the land of Israel was a reconstruction of the temple. This being the center of Israel's worship life and of Israel's self-understanding as the people of covenant who have been made promises by God. It is appropriate that we study Ezra and Nehemiah at this particular time in our run up to the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, and in particular the report of the task force for reimagining the Episcopal Church. A pointing toward the future, while maintaining continuity with the past. It's also in the context of the recent release of the pew report, which outlines the changing religious landscape in North America. Challenges that we are clearly experiencing in our own congregations, that if we recognize that no longer can we do business as usual, but rather we must do church in new ways that are responsive to contemporary needs, but also point us toward a hope-filled future while

WEEK XXIV: II Chronicles 31 – Ezra 10 /
Psalm 136

From Psalm 136. Let us pray.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. O give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever. Amen.

I'm Todd Ousley, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan and this is the

maintaining continuity with the tradition. As we go through Ezra and Nehemiah and reflect on both denominational, national, and congregational issues for the future, there's some questions we can consider.

1 - How might we mine the past for hopeful signs for our congregation's future?

2 - How might we make room for an imaginative future rather than doing things as we've always done them?

God bless you, and I'll see you next week on the Biblical Wild.