

# THE BIBLICAL WILD

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WEEK XXV: Nehemiah 1 – Ester 3 / Psalm  
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From Psalm 138. Let us pray.

I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. On the day I called you answered me, you increased my strength of soul. Amen.

I'm Todd Ousley, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan and this is the Biblical Wild, pioneers in the Christian wilderness. As we move from Ezra and the first few chapters of Nehemiah, we move from a time of focus on return and reconstruction now toward renewal and reform. With the people returned to Jerusalem, the temple rebuilt, the community restored, and the walls of Jerusalem once again in place, it is time to move into renewal and reformation of the congregation. Last week's consideration was focused on the restoration community's continuity with the past. We're going to point toward the future and connect the present and the past with the future of the people of Israel. Care is taken through the use of lineage, both in Ezra and in Nehemiah to assure us that there is a connection between the people who were part of the original restoration, who are now a part of this renewal and reform of the worship and the life of the congregation. It's another way of emphasizing the continuity with the past and bringing all of that forward. We also see a renewal of the covenant relationship, that renewal of the covenant that happens repeatedly throughout Holy Scripture. A reminder to the people of Israel that God's promises are enduring even in the midst of the adversities that they experience across the generations. As I read the narrative of Ezra and Nehemiah, I can't help but be reminded of the narrative of our own Diocese of Eastern Michigan. If you imagined the Diocese of Eastern Michigan as being a gathered people of God who have hopes and dreams and a self-understanding that they had been blessed with local autonomy, with independence of thought, with grassroots initiatives, and you take into account the fact that the creation of our Diocese, was in many ways, a response to a feeling of exile, of being in oppression under the Diocese of Michigan. There was a certain restriction that people felt and much of the impetus of creating the Diocese was to get some elbow room and opportunity to move and to live more fully as the people that God intended for us to be. And it's only in our most recent history that we've been able to move into a time of not being concerned about restoration of community and structure, but rather looking at renewal and reform, pointing ourselves to new possibilities, embracing imaginative and creative ways of being church, that point us toward a hopeful future, yet maintain an important continuity with our past, and with our traditions. As we conclude our study of Ezra and Nehemiah, I invite you to move toward a reflection on your own individual faith, and how you might theologically reflect on that, using the model set in Ezra and Nehemiah. The questions for us are the same as last week:

- 1 - How might we mine the past for hopeful signs for our individual future?
- 2 - How might we make room for an imaginative future rather than doing things as we've always done them?

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