

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10, Psalm 19, Luke 4:14-21, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31
Epiphany 3C
By Rose Schrott Taylor

In his latest novel *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Anthony Doerr explores, among other things, how stories come to be — not how they are written, but how they survive. He focuses on a (fictional) Greek manuscript and portrays some of the hands and lives that it passes through to survive millennia. Reading this book brought me back to my summer studying ancient Greek in seminary and our conversations around the art and history of translation, the different scrolls that have been debated and combined into our modern versions of the Bible.

What a miracle the Bible is. Beyond the God-breathed stories, I'm talking about the physical book. Imagine all the hands that have touched these texts over millennia. The scribes, bent over poor candlelight, tracking words on one papyrus with one hand while they copy the text with their other hand on a new, clean sheet. The dusty, dark rooms that scrolls were kept in, and sometimes forgotten about (as we see when Hilkiah finds the Torah in 2 Chronicles 34:14-16). The stories of ancestors that were told around the firelight, whispered into ears of sleepy children, and proclaimed over meals that, eventually, were written into a narrative. The Bible is a miracle. It is full of human effort, mistakes, and edits. Yet, God blesses it and uses it as a gift to call us to God's self, to remind us of our history. The Bible is our inheritance. It is a constant reminder that God is with us, in all our humanness.

Perhaps this is why the people of Israel wept when they heard Ezra read from the Torah in the shadow of the newly constructed walls of Jerusalem after their Babylonian captivity (Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10). Perhaps this is why Jesus chooses to begin his public ministry in Luke's Gospel by reading from Isaiah in the Temple of his childhood (Luke 4:14-21). Perhaps this is why Psalm 19 calls the law of the Lord sweeter than "drippings of the honeycomb" (v.10). God is with us. In all our human shortcomings, in our pain, in our revisionist history, in our anger, in our joy, God is with us.

As we move through the season of Epiphany, the church calendar invites us to look for the ways that God reveals God's self to us. As Psalm 19 reminds us, the revelation of our Creator is constant and vast, whether it is in the complexity of the universe, the lives of others who follow God, the honest prayers of those who see their shortcomings, the quiet gifts of protection strength, and courage, and the dialogues of faith we have with ourselves, our community, and God. 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 reminds us, too, that God reveals God's self through our community and the combination of all of our gifts. God's presence is not limited to the physical pages of our Bible, the stories these pages contain, or the story of how these pages came to be. God is everywhere and in everything. But God *is* in the pages of our Bibles – in the stories they contain and in the story of how those pages came to be. What a miracle the Bible is.

Questions for reflection

1. How have you experienced God's epiphany this week? What did you learn about God in this encounter? What did God teach you about yourself?

2. Reflect on the gift of the Bible. What does this book mean to you? What can we learn from it?
3. What does it mean that God blesses and uses our humanness – our shortcomings and gifts? What hope does this offer?