

Scripture: Nehemiah 3 v. 6-12

Good morning, we are looking further today at the daunting task given to Nehemiah.

Nehemiah in his heart knew that God had spoken to him during his prayer time; there's work to do, "my Holy City Jerusalem is broken down, the walls are just piles of rubble".

God wants to give Nehemiah the task to manage and organise the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem destroyed by the Babylonian attack on God's people. Nehemiah was a captive, given the important post of the King's cup bearer, so he needed permission from the King to go and manage, supervise, the rebuild.

Nehemiah needed the courage and boldness to speak to the King Artaxerxes, and the opportunity is recorded at the beginning of chapter 2.

Nehemiah was fortunate that when Artaxerxes made the edict to stop the work on Jerusalem, he had left the possibility of the work starting again. He said it could be started again on his authority.

So Nehemiah, after praying to God, asks the King for everything that he needed to get the job done, showing that not only had he been praying and fasting persistently for 4 months for the opportunity to speak with the king, he had also been preparing for the work to be started.

He planned for God's positive response to his prayers.

The King grants Nehemiah's requests, and he goes to Judah, giving the letters of authority from the king to the governors in the region. He goes to Jerusalem, where he spends 3 days examining the walls and planning for the work.

In Nehemiah chapter 3, we see some evidence of the amount of planning that went into the building of the walls. There was a lot of planning needed before the work could start. We see organization in this chapter to make sure each section of the wall and each gate, would have people working on it.

The list of workers seems to take us counter-clockwise around the wall. It begins at the sheep gate and the two towers on the north side of the city (v1) and circles around the city until it gets back to the sheep gate (v32).

One phrase that is repeated 15-20 times in this chapter is "next to him/after him." The volunteers are working right next to each other, working with one another (Ephesians 4, Romans 12). Having someone next to you can be an encouragement for you as you work.

These builders were not "professional" builders. There were people of all occupations encouraged by Nehemiah to take on the rebuild, volunteers, serving and honouring God. I was struck by the fact that these were no professional builders or carpenters listed. Instead, we see perfumers (v8), goldsmiths (v8, 31), temple servants (v26), merchants (v32), and the High Priest/priests.

There were many other leaders and official (other than the High Priest). No one is too good to get their hands dirty. Many are from other cities, having travelled long distances to carry out the work and they were pleased to be there answering God's call.

An official with his daughters in v12- women were working too! Everyone's role is important.

The leaders of the Tekoite people (v5) did not want to get their hands dirty. Having a leader that does not want to work could be discouraging to their people. But the common people of the Tekoites worked in spite of this.

The Tekoites even repaired a second portion of the wall (v27). Along with the Tekoites, 6 other groups repaired two portions of the wall.

In front of your house. How well would you build the wall around your house? Would you make sure this is the strongest part of the wall? (Working where family can see)

In verse 11, Malkijah, son of Harim was one of those men who 13 years earlier had married a foreign wife and had been convicted of wrong under Ezra's ministry. He had put the matter right, and the building of Jerusalem's wall provided him with an opportunity to reaffirm, in practical terms, obedience to God and love for his people (Ezra 10:31).

In v13, we are told that Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired 1000 cubits of the wall (approx 1500 ft). This is the biggest measurement we are given.

Everybody, wanted to work to play their part, working together in obedience to God, guided by Nehemiah.

Nehemiah had so marvellously organized and planned the work that every one had a section of the wall or a gate assigned to him.

Some exceeded their allotment of work and went on to help somebody else to the extent of repairing 500 yards of wall (an enormous section; perhaps much of it was still standing and needed little repair). We can find other mentions of men who did their work and then repaired "another" section.

A phrase that comes to mind is honouring God, working in his Kingdom. The important truth that emerges is that this is God's design for ministry. God has placed us all strategically where he wants us to be. Your neighbourhood, office, or home is where your ministry should be. That is why God put you there. In John 15, I find it very humbling, to see God's people going about their daily task, honouring and serving God in what they do, so that the glory goes to HIM.

In our second reading for today, from 1 Corinthians 12 v12 -20, Paul emphasizes that although there are many separate parts, ears, eyes, hands, feet etc, they remain part of the one body.

In verse 12, Paul spells this out "The body is a unit, it is made up of many parts, but they come together to form one body. So it is with Christ.

If we move back to workers rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, we recognise that they were Jews. Their hearts were broken because their sacred city, Jerusalem, was a pile of rubble.

God had called them, his people, through his servant Nehemiah, to come and rebuild his city. They were people with different trades and talents, but they were members of the Jewish nation and they came together as a body, answering God's call.

In the Corinthian reading, the apostle Paul uses an analogy that will help us understand how the church is designed to function. He stands before us as a human body, and draws lessons from it all through the rest of the chapter, showing its parallel with the function of the Body of Christ.

It is more than a mere figure of speech to say that the church is the Body of Christ. God really takes that seriously. It is the tool by which God's plan is fulfilled in us today, as members of the body of Christ. We as the body of Christ are the tools by which God completes his task in the world today.

The head is the control centre of the body, while the torso is the biggest part of it, and the part to which the members, the arms, the legs, etc., are attached. This is especially designed to help us understand how the church is to function, for the whole body, plus the head, constitutes the Body of Christ.

This is an amazing statement, that we are part of Christ. That is what Paul is saying. We constitute the means by which Christ functions within the world, and it is very important that we hold that concept clearly in our mind if we want to understand how the church works.

It is a body with many members, and yet it is only one body. It is not many bodies, many denominations. They are all tied together by sharing the same life, and they are tied with the head so that they function as Jesus means of expressing his life in this world.

Then Paul says it does not make any difference what your origin is, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, "all were made to drink of one Spirit."

Jesus put that in a very beautiful little formula: He said that the relationship we would have would be this, "You in me, and I in you," (John 14:20). That is what you find fulfilled here in regard to the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit baptizes us into the Body of Christ he puts us into Christ, "you in me." He joins our life with his; he becomes our source of existence and strength; we are part of him.

The amazing statement here is that we are part of Christ. That is what Paul is saying here. We are Jesus workers in the Kingdom building and working for Him.

That means that where we live, and the people we live with, is the very place God wants us to exercise the gifts he has given us to do the work of the church.

But this is difficult at the moment with the increase of covid19, in our country and around the world, we are told to isolate, to keep our distance, to wear face masks, use hand sanitizers, this is obeying the rules our government has laid down to keep us and our community safe.

But we as Jesus church, as his active body here in his kingdom on earth, we have a responsibility to follow Jesus' plans for his people and be actively working, just as the Jews followed Nehemiah's plans.

Following the government rules and the guidelines laid down by our Church of England, our church at All Saints is planning to hold services, to encourage isolated and limited numbers to come together to worship.

We have a choice to make as to how we want to respond to this. There are also good options of following services On Line, joining in daily prayer groups, joining in bible studies and remaining actively involved in our church.

I really enjoy the sudden morning services On Line, so many fellowship members using their God given talents to be an active part in the service. All of us have talents we can use to serve and bring honour to our God. We don't have to be professionals to use our talent, none of the Jews that rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem were professional builders, but they had willing hearts to work for and serve their God.

Don't let us say I can't do it, rather say with God's help I can. If you want to be an active member, by helping to rebuild the spiritual life of our church and its worship, make contact with Andrea and Jenny, and also like Nehemiah pray to God to guide you and support you in your quest.

Our Church of England may never be the same again, but it's exciting as we make new plans to accommodate the needs of our world for today.

This is what Nehemiah (and Peter) calls us to do: to spiritually repair these gates and allow ourselves to become all that God intended us to be.

Prayer

Thank you, our Father, for this great truth. We pray that your Spirit of grace will make these gates real to us. Point out those areas that need to be worked on in our lives, that we may enter into them fully as the body of Christ. AMEN

Healing Service

The Armour of God