

**Frederick First Church of the Nazarene**

Series: **Repairer of Broken Walls**

Message: **Next Steps**

**June 14, 2020**

Isaiah 58:6-12

Nehemiah 2-4

Scriptures from Wednesday's Bible study have been running through my head this week. They are from the Revised Common Lectionary, a resource we use almost weekly at Frederick Nazarene. We opened with Psalm 100, a declaration of the majesty of God: Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." Then we turned our focus to Genesis 18 where Abraham and Sarah, both in their nineties, are told they will have a son in the next year. Sarah's response was laughter, but Jesus' reply was, "Is anything too hard for God?" The Romans passage we studied, chapter 5, verses 1-8, speaks of God demonstrating His own love for us by sending Jesus to die for our sins. God's majesty in the Psalm; God's power in any circumstance in Genesis; and God's abundant and unfailing love in Roman. Can we believe, today, that sovereign God whose love endures forever, and who can do anything He sets His mind to doing, can handle state of affairs in our lives, our families, our communities, our nation, our world? Absolutely! "Is anything too hard for God?" I want to live into this kind of optimism in the Eternal, trusting and believing that righteousness and justice and truth will certainly prevail as God's Kingdom people walk by faith and not by sight.

**Series:** Repairer of Broken Walls (Isaiah 58:6-12)

**Message:** Next Steps (Nehemiah 2-4)

During the three or four months that intervened between receiving the news about Jerusalem's demise and talking to the king about his calling, it is evident that the conviction grew in Nehemiah that there was something he could do to aid in the answers to his prayers. He found favor in the eyes of the king and, when given the opportunity to talk to the king about rebuilding the wall, the first thing he did was pray. It's never bad when the first thing we do is pray. Nehemiah had spent months praying and fasting and calling on God. He doesn't go back to that kind of praying. Someone has called the type of praying he did before making his request to the king an "arrow prayer" or "parenthetical prayer," a type of prayer he made a habit of praying – brief, pointed petitions expressed by Nehemiah in an emergency. You cannot acquire this habit of arrow prayer unless you spend prolonged periods in fellowship with God. When we take time to be with God in private, we will not find it difficult at any moment to step aside and ask Him a question. Not only does Nehemiah direct an arrow prayer to God, but when the king has responded with favor toward him and given him permission to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall, Nehemiah's response is, "because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests."

Adam Clarke writes, "This noble spirited man attributes everything to God." PE Kretzman says, "God Himself is zealous for His people, for His Church, and hears the prayers of faithful children." WP Lockhart points out that "Nehemiah recognized God in all. Secondary causes would not explain the result; it must be traced to its true source."

What have we seen in Nehemiah since he was told that the walls were demolished, that Jerusalem was in ruins? We have seen him fall down and weep. We have seen him mourn and fast and pray. We have heard his passionate cry to God recognizing God's sovereignty and covenant love, asking for audience with the Almighty, confessing the sin of the nation and his own sin, and reminding God of His promise to restore if the people would return to obeying God. Nothing but humility, tenderness, repentance, and selflessness as he cried out to God.

What do we see from God in response to Nehemiah's sincere cry? We see God's favor and blessing on His servant, allowing Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem for the task of repairing the walls.

When Nehemiah arrived in the City of God, he is almost immediately made aware of jealousy and suspicion of certain powerful political enemies (Sanballat and Tobiah). God's work rarely goes forward without opposition.

Three days after his arrival in Jerusalem, Nehemiah made a secret tour to examine the city walls. He rode (on a donkey) around the city by night inspecting the walls and the gates thoroughly. What he found was even worse than he had anticipated. Everywhere were the marks of destruction and complete devastation. However, there was no lack of available materials for restoring the walls. What was needed most was manpower, so the cooperation of the entire Jewish population was necessary. After investigating the condition of the walls, Nehemiah received full cooperation of the Jewish leaders, who exclaimed with enthusiasm, "Let us start rebuilding." Then to his enemies who were going to do everything they could to discourage and intimidate, he says with faith and determination, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding."

Listen again to the words of the Scripture as Nehemiah calls his people to action: "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." And he adds this little side note – "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me...."

From the beginning of his journey as repairer of the broken wall, Nehemiah had his eyes fixed on God. He cried out to God; he shot an arrow prayer to God; he declared that his success was God's doing; he didn't listen to the negatives around him but quietly took time to see the destruction and devastation for himself; he addressed the people not as one who had the answers, but as one empowered by God; he sought cooperation and oneness with the people. He had faith that God was able to help him perform the work to which God had called him.

Chapter 3 of Nehemiah is one of the most meaningful boring chapters in the Bible. It is a list of names and the responsibilities those people had in repairing the walls. Here are the key phrases of the chapter – "next to them" and "after him." Every part of the wall had its builders who were strategically repairing the section of wall nearest to their homes. All sound Kingdom-building begins in the home and among those who are closest to us. Careful organization and the cooperation of all the members of the community was necessary. God's work should challenge all classes of people alike. Cooperation is the keynote of Nehemiah 3.

Beginning in chapter 4 through the middle of chapter 6, we see four ways in which God's people are constantly attacked when they aim to go forward. Discouraging sarcasm, enemy attacks, disunity within, and false accusations. The wall repairers were mocked, plans were made to attack them, there were accomplices to social injustices within the ranks of the Jews rebuilding the walls, and there were entrapment attempts against Nehemiah. In 4:4-5 we hear another of Nehemiah's arrow prayers – concise, to the point, calling God to action. The workers overcame by working "with all their heart," praying "to our God," and posting "a guard day and night to meet the threat." This sounds a little, in the physical, like Ephesians 6 where Paul, inspired by God, calls God's people fight to the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms by putting "on the full armor of God."

It is beautiful that the people had a mind to work, or had a heart to work. Their hearts were engaged in it; and where the heart is engaged the work of God goes well.