

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

By the Rev. Dr. John S. Niles MSM

“Tough Times Never Last”

NEHEMIAH 2:11-20

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzjEzohHmaM> --before the sermon

Confronting a challenge sometimes requires that we change the way we look at things. As the youtube clip that we watched showed the blind man who was getting no one to pay attention and give money with the words, “I’m blind, can you help”. A simple change in words by a lady who passed by allowed people to look at things differently. Those words, “It’s a beautiful day and I can’t see it”. Changed everything.

Nehemiah not only had to change the way he looked at things. He had to change the way a King, and a defeated people looked at things. What a challenge! He had to get them to understand that Tough times never last. But the decisions we make can make them worse or better.

We saw over the last two weeks, how one person can change his world, and with just three questions start on a new path to life. We heard how he, a low level civil servant convinced the most powerful person in his world, King Artaxzes, to send him to help a defeated people and to send troops and the authority to get supplies and have them paid for by the King.

I

To have been able to do this, he had to be willing to confront the challenge before him, by firstly **ignoring the fears within you**. Fear has been said to be false evidence, Appearing Real. Even so, fear is a powerful emotion - it can grip and immobilizing. It can keep one from succeeding in life. Fear wants to steal your joy, take your courage and leave you cold, and trembling. Everyone has a fear. You may have a fear of death, failure, defeat, rejection, or a host of other things.

Nehemiah put aside his fear; held on to his faith took the first step risking failure for a change and a new future.

This hymn (A Mighty Fortress is Our God) is one of the most significant in church history. It was written by Martin Luther on his way to the Diet of Worms. He was invited to this meeting by the Holy Roman Emperor and the pope under the guise that they were interested in hearing his views that conflicted with the objectives of the religious establishment of his day. Actually the counsel was set up as a trap. First it was their intention to humiliate Luther and then murder him on his way home.

Luther knew his life and reputation were at risk, but he went nonetheless. On the way, he

was comforted by the words of Psalm 46: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.” (Psalm 46:1-3) It was then that Luther penned this famous hymn.

As it turned out, Luther was craftier than his adversaries and defended his cause in the meeting with authority and eloquence. On the way home, as he was traveling in his carriage in the forest, friendly Prince Philip “kidnapped” Luther and kept him in his castle, protecting him from eminent harm.

II

When confronting a challenge, you have to ignore the fears within you and secondly, **inspect the foundation in under you**. Nehemiah inspected his surroundings. He checked the confines, then he looked into the conditions, and finally for contingencies.

He inspected. As I said, last week; “Those who fail to plan; plan to fail.” Nehemiah planned ahead. So often problems would be overcome if only someone took the time to plan ahead by inspecting before starting.

He wanted to rebuild the walls of his city. He knew there would be challenges and he took the time to find out what they were.

There was an elderly lady who was waiting in the waiting room with her daughter. The nurse entered the waiting area and announced for the elderly lady to go on back to see the doctor. The nurse spoke louder but still she could not hear.

The elderly lady’s daughter leaned over and said, “mother let’s turn your hearing aid up.” Then she yelled in shock, “That’s not your hearing aid, it’s a suppository!”

The elderly mother replied, “Well, now I know where my hearing aid went!”

III

When confronting a challenge ignored the fears within you, inspect the foundation before you, thirdly, **inspire the people around you**. *Then I said to them, “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.”* 18 *I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work. (Neh 2:17-18)*

What is the difference between a mediocre teacher, a good teacher, a superior teacher, and a great teacher? Journalist William Arthur Ward said, The mediocre teacher tells, the good teacher explains, the superior teacher demonstrates, but the great teacher inspires. (Bits and Pieces) One of the most inspirational lines I have heard was uttered by a skater who was barely a teen then. Naomi Nari Nam was thirteen and sensational when she (2/27/99), was placed second to Michelle Kwan in the 1999 U. S. National Figure Skating Championship. She revealed to the TV audience what inspired her to her shock placing among the more experienced, skillful and mature girls. Nam said she adored Michelle Kwan and admired Tara Lipinski’s performance in the Olympics. After watching the thrilling duel between her two favorite Olympians, the then pre-teen told and reminded herself countless times these six words while she was on the practice rink: “One day that could be me.”

What did Nehemiah say that got their cooperation, earned their respect and sustained the Israelites to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? Nehemiah persuaded them by referring again to the state of things: the broken walls and consumed gates (2:17, 2:13, 2:3, 1:3). Nehemiah laid down the fundamental rule of change: the dissatisfaction factor. To change, one must feel uneasy, be disgruntled, and show intolerance of current conditions. So Nehemiah told them honestly how bad, neglected, and unacceptable the situation was (v 17). And then he inspired them to do something about it.

IV

When confronting a challenge ignored the fears within you, inspect the foundation before you, inspire people around you, and finally, **invest in the future before you**. When others mocked him for the work he was trying to do, he simply told them he was going to do what he could to make a difference. Nehemiah understood what was important and was willing to invest in it. Nehemiah understood the obstacles, setbacks, and troubles were expected, and he did not let these things discourage him from starting and completing the job. *"Are you rebelling against the king?" 20 I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it." (Neh 2:19-20)*

The Queen said she knew that sometimes the world's problems seem too big for individuals to affect. "On our own, we cannot end wars or wipe out injustice. But the cumulative impact of thousands of small acts of goodness can be bigger than we imagine."

Emerson when speaking of success said, it is "to laugh often and much to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to leave this world a little better than you found it-whether by a loving child, a good friend, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition. To know that one life breathed easier because you lived. That is have succeeded.

You think about that. Amen