

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
By Captain Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

“Everyday Heroes”

NEHEMIAH 3:1-32
Read only 3:1-5

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

A man was praying, “Father, I want to thank you that so far today, I have not been anxious, worried, angry, violent, lustful, I have not drank, sworn or spoken an unkind word, but in five minutes I’m going to be getting out of bed and then I’m really going to need your help.” Life is like that isn’t it? It isn’t easy.

We have heard over the last three weeks since beginning this study on the book of Nehemiah that - one person can make a difference, and that by answering just three questions you can start on a new path in life, and that there is a way to confront your challenges without being crushed by them.

And now we turn our attention to Nehemiah 3. To be honest it is a strange chapter. It is a chapter that is rarely preached on. Normally, it would be ignored by those who are expositors - as I am - and to be honest, I almost did. And it is skipped in the lectionary completely for those clergy who use the lectionary - it doesn’t even appear. It is a chapter filled with lists and names. There are 38 different painfully difficult to pronounce names, and 42 equally difficult place names from which we are told the people traveled to gather together to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

So what?! The fact was that these were not just the important, significant, notable, prominent or famous people of that time mentioned in the passage- but rather, the ordinary, regular, everyday people. The everyday heroes - like that ones we saw in the YouTube clip at the beginning of this message

I recently read about a little girl who came home from Sunday School right after studying this verse, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

She asked her mother, when she repeated the verse, what it meant. Her mom said, "Well, it means that when you are good and kind and thoughtful and obedient, you are letting Christ’s light shine in your life before all who know you." The very next Sunday in Sunday School, the little girl got in a bit of a fracas with another student and created somewhat of an uproar--to such an extent that the Sunday School teacher had to go and find her mother to get her settled down a bit in the class. Her mother was concerned when she got to the classroom and said, "Sweetie, don’t you remember about letting your light shine for the Lord before [others]?" The girl blurted out, "Mom, I blew myself out!"

Robert Lewis in his book *The Church of Irresistible Influence*, “More than by decades or centuries, history is marked by great ideas; that is, when someone, placed in a unique culture and circumstance, stands up and says, ‘What if we believed – and acted upon – this?’ Luther’s idea of grace. Ghandi’s idea of nonviolent resistance. Ford’s idea of efficiency. Einstein’s idea of relativity....” Nehemiah’s idea of rebuilding is more than a starting point; in a deep sense it is everything. An idea strong enough to spark imagination, inspire sacrifice, build faith, and encourage perseverance is the most powerful human force on the planet. It has the power to determine the future – for good and for bad.” Look at Nehemiah 2:17 (read through verse 18). Another version says, “So they put their hands to the good work.” In other words, they committed to the vision.

I

What we see in this chapter 3 is everyday people, everyday heroes, who stepped up to make a difference - to let their light shine – who refused to give up because on some level they recognized that there was a **clear purpose**.

A teacher was helping one of her kindergarten students put his boots on? He asked for help and she could see why. With her pulling and him pushing, the boots still didn't want to go on. Finally, after much effort and sweat, the teacher got the second boot was on. She almost whimpered when the little boy said, "Teacher, they're on the wrong feet." She looked and sure enough, they were. It wasn't any easier pulling the boots off then it was putting them on. She managed to keep her cool as together they worked to get the boots back on - this time on the right feet. She said, wiping her brow, finally, we got your boots on. He then announced, "These aren't my boots." "Why didn't you say so?" Once again she struggled to help him pull the ill-fitting boots off. She said, so where are your boots. He points to the same boots and then said, "They're my brother's boots. My Mom made me wear them." She didn't know if she should laugh or cry. She mustered up the grace to wrestle the boots on his feet again. She said, "Now, where are your mittens?" He said, "I stuffed them in the toes of my boots so I wouldn't loose them."

Just because the purpose is clear, doesn't mean it is going to be easy. Nehemiah had articulated the vision, a simple one: come, let us rebuild the walls. " There is nothing particularly ground-breaking about recognizing the simple fact that we must work together on the same team after the same goal if we are going to have success as a church! And yet I have to say that one could go to a large number of churches Canada and the USA and find that there would be no clear direction among the people, no clear purpose which people could articulate. When we aim at nothing and hit it with accuracy! – that becomes a problem. " To the degree that we focus only on our own agendas, we will be distracted from God's agenda and the goals toward which He would have us move.

Unity of purpose is absolutely indispensable. And unity ought to be centered around a shared focus we set our hearts on God's glory and upon God's purpose.

Someone once said that snow is a beautiful demonstration of what God can do with a bunch of flakes! "

A single snowflake is among the most delicate, frail things we can see. But if enough of them stick together they can paralyze a city!

Nehemiah had a vision to rebuild the walls for his community. And it is a vision that was as important then as it is now. For us, at Stouffville United – a church that has been for decades making a difference in more ways than can be mentioned – we too have come to a point as a

church that the vision needs to be one of rebuilding our Church in order to make sure that Stouffville United is here for years to come. The purpose is clear, but it doesn't mean it will be easy. That is why everyday heroes are important.

II

Everyday heroes recognize that there is a clear purpose and secondly, **a price to be paid.**

Notice this as well: this wasn't easy work! It cost them something! For nearly two months these folks dropped everything that they were doing in order to daily climb on a wall and work. This wasn't glorious work from an earthly standpoint; it was sweaty, back-breaking hard labor. Let's not spiritualize this: these were real people with real muscles that hurt really badly like ours do when we do this kind of thing! This work tested their physical resources to the breaking point! And it goes without saying as well that they did not have all of the sophisticated tools and apparatus at their disposal that we do! This was tough work done in a hot sun with much opposition, which we will talk about in weeks to come. They paid the price to get it done!

Some even went on to work on a second section of the wall after finishing their assigned work. You'll see the name of Meremoth in verse 4 and again in verse 21; of Meshullam in verse 4 and again in verse 30; you'll see the men of Tekoa in verse 5 and again in verse 27. These guys didn't just do what they were assigned to do; their hearts were such that they found work to do until the work was done, paying the price to accomplish the task.

It is popular today to hear about all the blessings and favor you will get if you just believe the right things and pray the right way. Yet, a fuller picture is not just about believing the right things and praying the right way but being blessed because of doing the right things. Sometimes it is about doing the will of God amid the ugliness of this world; it is the picking up cross and following him into a life of service and sacrifice – like the everyday heroes of Nehemiah's time did. For them it was about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, giving safety to families, and hope and security for the future.

For us, it may be donating school supplies to indigenous children in northern Ontario or visiting those in need and bearing one another's burdens. It is also could be about building up a congregation so that this type of work can still be done, it is about doing the difficult and inglorious work that must be done which will likely not be rewarded with earthly acclaim or financial benefit.

We also recognize that the price to be paid can be in the cost of sweat of good work, but also through tears of grief for the loss of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. Today is Police Remembrance Sunday as well as Orange shirt Sunday. And we recognize the death and sacrifice of PC Andrew Hung who was just doing his job as a police traffic officer and who was killed just for wearing the uniform. There is a cost that is paid, and it is a debt owed by all but often only paid by a few and borne by their families. So we not only honour that sacrifice, but recognize the importance of doing and not forgetting those who like PC Andrew Hung gave their all for us. That is why Nehemiah wrote all those names in this chapter, because he didn't want people to forget the price paid by a few for all.

III

Everyday heroes recognize that there is a higher purpose in what they do and a price to be paid and finally, **a part to be played**. If not them –who? And if not now –when?

We read of people coming from Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, Mizpah, Zanoah, Beth Hakkerem, Beth Zur, and Keilah, among others. What we need to understand is that these people were folks who had nothing to gain from being there to work on the wall. They did not live in Jerusalem; they were from outside the city. They could have easily stayed home and said, that doesn't affect me! " Yet, they got in there and worked shoulder to shoulder with the people of the city.

Daniel "Rudy" Ruettinger, whose life dream was to play football for Notre Dame.

Rudy was the son of an oil refinery worker. He had 13 other brothers and sisters. He was short and small, yet his dream was to play for the Notre Dame Fighting Irish football team. No one believed he ever would – not even his family. He didn't have the marks to get into Notre Dame University and his parents didn't have the money. If he was accepted to any University, he would have to hope that if he did well, Notre Dame would accept him as a transfer student. That alone was a long shot. Then there was the problem of money. Coming from a large family he would have to pay his own way. He would have to work to make enough to go. He never let the obstacles or the criticisms stand in the way of achieving his dream.

In 1975, as fans cheered RU-DY, RU-DY; he was able to sack the quarterback in the last 27 seconds of the game. If that wasn't amazing enough, he did so during the final play of the final game of the year and the only game of his college football career.

After achieving the transfer to Notre Dame, Rudy convinced the coach to let him play as one of the second string players. He played and practiced and took a beating every day of his four-year university career without ever having the assurance that he would play in a game or even suit up for a game. He did what he could to make the team better. Even if that meant, he would never play on it.

He did so, never giving up and with a positive belief in his dream. As a result, others started wanting it for him as much as he wanted it for himself. His positive belief in his dream made it happen. For this reason, he has gone down in the history of Notre Dame Football as the only player in the school's history to be carried off the field on his teammates' shoulders.

His powerful and positive belief in his dream was told in the blockbuster movie *RUDY*. Also, because of his incredible story, many sports programs and corporations now give out a Rudy Award and sponsorships helping those in need.

Rudy, like Nehemiah, inspired others to strive and believe that they could rebuild to achieve that dream of rebuilding.

For as the Broadway Musical director Oscar Hammerstein II said "you gotta have a dream. If you don't have a dream, how you gonna make a dream come true?" You think about that. Amen