

Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
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Dealing with Discouragement on Thanksgiving

Nehemiah 4:1-15

October 9, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogweL4E24ok>

Just because it is Thanksgiving Sunday, doesn't mean that we feel thankful.

As the youtube clip we just watched explained- life is like a cup of coffee; much of the discouragement that we experience in life comes from our reaction to those things outside of us. Social media is something that makes that ever present. Whether it is twitter, tiktok, facebook Instagram, most of the time you will see people trying to show you how wonderful their lives are resulting in those who are watching feeling, less then. Whether it is the appeal of another's person's life and the resulting envy and jealousy that we experience as we look at it; or the frustration or stress we feel when trying to acquire it; or, the anger and bitterness we feel when we see someone succeeding where we seem only to fail or fall or fall-short. And in our discouragement we seek to discourage others.

In her column, *Ask Marilyn*, Marilyn vos Savant gave an interesting perspective on contentment. One reader wrote in about a unique experiment she had conducted after being dissatisfied that her neighbor's yard looked better than her own. She did what few have done and walked next door to look back at her own grass. When she stood in her neighbor's yard, the grass in her own yard now looked greener than theirs so she asked, "Why does this occur?"

Marilyn replied, "The grass looks greener on the other side of the fence because you're not close enough to see the dirt." Most of the time, things look better for others simply because we can't see their dirt.

You see, Nehemiah was not the only one in chapter 4 of the book of Nehemiah to feel that discouragement He and the people were enthusiastic, dedicated, and hopeful. And yet, into all that good work came Sandballet and Tobiah – the villains in the story – were no less frustrated, bitter, and discouraged. But rather than do as Nehemiah did in his initial discouragement and despair about the walls being down; which was to reach out to God for direction and then take action to change the situation and discover, a passion for a new purpose and work, enthusiasm and dedication to complete it; Sandballat and Tobiah sought only to sit in their misery and become embittered, jealous, and angry; and then to take out that bitterness on others.

Just because it is Thanksgiving, doesn't make us feel thankful. It requires a choice -as we saw in the video- to savor life.

I

So what is to be done in the face of discouragement – that of our own or the discouragement we experience because of others? Firstly, **believe sincerely**. Nehemiah sincerely, believed that God was in control; and the Lord would make a way when there seemed to be no way. And with every step of faith; he found himself on more solid ground.

It began when he first asked King Artaxerxes to not only let him go to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem by to be paid to do it, and to be given military protection and the finances to make it happen. It was a pretty gutsy request. And his faith was confirmed when the King said yes. And so when the attacks by Sanballat and Tobiah in verse 1-2 began, he responded in the same manner. He called out to God and reached out to others.

At the time it was completed in 1937, the Golden Gate Bridge was the longest suspension bridge in the world. During the first phase of the project 23 men fell to their deaths in the icy water. Things were going from bad to worse because there were very few safety devices. And so, when it was halfway completed, they decided to take another look and make some changes.

They reorganized and built the largest net ever made, and attached it under the area where the men were working. Was it worth the cost and the time it took to do this? There were ten men who fell into it without being injured. So for them it was worth it. Not only did it save those ten lives, I discovered that the work was completed in three-fourths the time originally planned for because the workers no longer lived in fear of falling.

It is easy, even on Thanksgiving to not feel thankful. Sometimes you really have to look for something to be thankful for. That was what Nehemiah was going through; yet because he believed sincerely that God's was his refuge and strength a very present help in trouble. It was easier to hold out hope. As a result, we can, as he did, expect great things from God, and attempt great things for God.

II

In the face of discouragement, believe sincerely, and secondly, **care deeply**. But make sure you care deeply about the right things.

Sanballat and Tobiah cared deeply but for the wrong things. They sought to tear down what Nehemiah and others wanted to build up. They wanted to stand in the way of things, instead of helping to make a way.

We have all heard it said, "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

A Sunday School teacher was telling the story of the Good Samaritan to her class of 4-5 year olds. She was making it as vivid as possible to keep the children interested in her tale. Then she asked the class, "If you saw a person lying on the roadside all wounded and bleeding, what would you do?" A thoughtful little girl broke the hushed silence, "I think I'd throw up."

The late Colonel Sanders (of Kentucky Fried Chicken) was on an airplane when an infant screamed and would not stop even though the mother and flight attendants tried every trick they could think of. Finally the Colonel asked if he could hold the baby. He gently rocked it to sleep. Later a passenger said, "We all appreciate what you did for us."

Colonel Sanders replied, "I didn't do it for us, I did it for the baby." "Compassion can't be measured in dollars and cents. It does come with a price tag, but that price tag isn't the amount of money spent. The price tag is love."—J. C. Watts Jr.

III

In the face of discouragement believe sincerely, care deeply, ensure stability, and finally, **live observantly**. It is not just that Nehemiah and the people were on guard; but rather that they were equally observant and vigilant in the duties they were responsible for. They watch out for each other and they watch over the work begin done. They knew what they were doing was important and were glad to do it.

A father who had children, and who was remembering a situation that happened when his children were very young; told me this story this past week. He and his wife wanted to instill in their youngest two children that it was time that they slept in their own beds and not with mommy and daddy. At the time they were doing this the father had to go on a business trip and so they reminded the children that when daddy was away they must not sleep in the master bedroom because they was big boys and girls now. Over and over again they were told they must not sleep in the master bedroom while daddy was gone.

So when the father arrived home from business trip; his wife and children went to Pearson Airport to greet him and in the midst of a large crowd of people coming off the planes and others greeting them the youngest came running to the father and with great delight said, "Daddy Daddy, no one slept with mommy when you were gone this time."

Count your blessings instead of your crosses;
Count your gains instead of your losses.

Count your joys instead of your woes;
Count your friends instead of your foes.

Count your smiles instead of your tears;
Count your courage instead of your fears.

Count your full years instead of your lean;
Count your kind deeds instead of your mean.

Count your health instead of your wealth;
Count on God instead of yourself.

If you do, you will be thankful even in the face of discouragement. You Think about that. Amen.