

Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
By the Rev.Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

"Joy and Woe"

Nehemiah 8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDZR0ql8O9M>

10th in the Nehemiah Series

November 06, 2022

We have been blessed! A blessing in Canada we sometimes have taken for granted.

And today on this Remembrance Day Sunday we remember those who have served in WWI and WWII and the wars and peacekeeping tours since Afghanistan ...and Ukraine. And we remember the first police and responders who faced down those who would do evil and injury and seek to disrupt our countries peace and security. And we say to them and to all those who would do us harm – that you may cause us to change HOW we do some things in this country but you will never change WHO we are as Canadians!

For those freedoms that define all of us came at too high a cost for it was the Veteran...

It is the Veteran, not the preacher, who has given us freedom of religion.^[SEP]

It is the Veteran, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press.

^[SEP]It is the Veteran, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech.^[SEP]

It is the Veteran, not the campus organizer, who has given us freedom to assemble.^[SEP]

It is the Veteran, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to a fair trial.^[SEP]

It is the Veteran, not the politician, who has given us the right to vote.^[SEP]

We remember today that justice, peace and security always come with a price.

So where does that leave us? Then as now, in the hands of Almighty God, and as people of God, and citizens of Canada who are to continue to do what we know we are called to do and that is to “do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.” To do as Isaiah said to bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the broken hearted, give liberty to the captive and comfort those that mourn.” And to do that - even now for

As Tennyson said,
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

And so when you get through the going through time, as Nehemiah did, it is a time to understand the lesson. Nehemiah knew his people were overwhelmed by the rush of emotion.; they had just come through a terrible time and now, are faced with hope that seems too good to be true. And the emotions are washing over them of all the losses and still there is joy. And Ezra said, "Go to your tents and eat of the fat and sweets and share with those who have none, for this day is holy unto the Lord, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Two elderly gentlemen had been friends their entire lives. One of them had to move across town, to a seniors' residence, so he called his buddy to give him directions to the new place. "It's easy, he said. "Get on the Vanna street bus, transfer onto the Sushi bus, get off on Groucho street. First building on the southeast corner, walk up the stairs and ring the doorbell with your elbow." The second man said, "All right, but why am I ringing the doorbell with my elbow?" The first man said, "What, you're not bringing anything?"

Life is a mixture of good and bad, happiness and sadness, laughter and loss. We all would like to avoid the pain and the crises in life. Yet, the irony for most of us is that we learn the most valuable things during the most trying times. Have you ever heard someone say, "I wouldn't go through that again, if you paid me a million dollars? But I wouldn't trade what I learned for anything."

Keats says that "this world is a vale of soul making." And he is write we are matured and molded in the midst of all that happens to us. Life can make us, or break us. It really depends on how we face life's adversity.

Blake said it this way,

Joy and woe are woven fine
A clothing of the soul divine
And when this we rightly know
Through the world we safely go.

Joy and woe are woven fine. Life can be hard and lonely. Life can knock the wind right out of you. It can take you by surprise and spin you around and cause you to be lost and disoriented. And then comes joy.

Nehemiah said, "Then he said unto them, Go your tents, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

A year or so before Covid we travelled to California with Make a Wish for our Son Sean who was given a wish to go to Disney land. We were surprised with a Van waiting for us to drive and so we didn't have to take a bus or taxi everywhere. We were very grateful. However, if you think Toronto's roads are bad you have never seen California's. Pot holes, cracks and construction everywhere. One of the things about travelling by car long distances, is that no matter what, you always get into construction. I'm sure that the construction workers get as fed up with the comments and the drivers the construction. Yet, there was this rather wise worker who placed on a sign on his grader that I've seen before. It read, "the road to happiness is almost always under construction."

The same applies not only to the roads themselves but to our lives and the lives that we lead. It is one that had detours and difficulties, pot holes and problems and it is not always smooth. There will always be twists and turns ups and downs. But it is a way to pass through. Like the Psalmist said when he said, Ye though I walk through the valley of the shadow..." Not ye though I sit in, stay in, remain, in build a place to live in the valley of the shadow of death but Ye though I pass through the valley.

St. Teresa says, simply, "everything is grace." If this is true; then the good gifts are grace, because they are a part of everything-- but then suffering is grace, because it is something. This very hard to accept. For most of us everything in us wants to refuse this fact. We don't want to accept that God could be allowing some suffering in our lives--not that suffering comes from God, but He allows it--to occur so to work out His purpose-- His will in us. So everything remains grace only in the hands of God. It is grace only as it calls us to God.

Nehemiah pointed out the lesson, and secondly, he looked for ways to **lift**. The bad times are for God's people, but God's people are also, for bad times. So stop being anxious and start getting into action.

St. Thomas More once said, "the times are never so bad that a good man cannot live in them." We know we live in difficult times. This message shouts to us from the T.V and screams to us from our newspapers. As parents and grandparents it is frightening to think of what is out there for our children. We fear for their safety, their survival, and their very souls. And often we wonder if we can be whole, healthy and holy in this life.

We live in difficult times. We are in bad times. But "the times are never so bad that a good man or woman cannot live in them." And I would add, and that the times are never so bad that a good and godly person cannot make a difference by living in them.

I spoke this past week with two WOs who were with 3RCR who were leaving to deploy with their unit to Poland on an extended exercise in order to stand in the gap if Russia decides to try anything there.

It remained me of when Russia was last in Poland and finally a green grocer had had enough of the demands to put communist propaganda on his walls and he tore them down and eventually was arrested by others stood up and still others until Lac Walensa gathered all the trade unionists together and everything stopped. Eventually, Russia resolve weakened and they pulled out. All because a green grocer said "this far no further."

III

Nehemiah reminds us, that when we come up against adversity, we should look for the lesson, for ways to lift. And thirdly, we must look to the **Lord**. Nehemiah could have given up in despair numerous times. He could have given way to bitterness. He could have raised his hand in rage against the opposition. However, he raised his voice in a choir of praise to the Lord. *"Then he said unto them, Go to your tents, eat the choice meats, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be grieving; for the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

We have always heard the phrase the "joy of the Lord is your strength". However, I have never really understood the meaning of it until after I held my sons face in my hands and looked deep into his eyes after he had fought and overcame a very hard battle and said, "I am so very proud of you and smiled" I watched as his chest welled with pride and smiled himself. It was almost as if he breathed my joy and strength into himself.

If no one has ever told you before, let me be the one to tell you how proud God is of you. You are his precious child.

A Veteran told me of an encounter he had with his mother after getting back from WWII. He said, "When I came back to the Canada after the war, I stayed with my parents for a 30-day leave. Mom's rules were simple: I could come and go as I pleased, but I must let her know when I returned home each night. After one long evening with friends, I crept into the house and didn't knock on Mom's door. Late the next morning when I came down to breakfast, she glared at me with icy silence. 'Look, Mom,' I said, 'I'm sorry I didn't tell you I got home safely last night, but what did you do all the time I was in Germany' 'Well,' she replied, 'at least then I knew where you were!'" I'm sure some of our men had a similar experience after returning from Afghanistan.

We remember the courage of the families who were left to wait, worry and wonder if they would ever see their loved one again; and who wept bitter tears when the worst news arrived. Who prayed to the Lord for their child's safe return, or for strength when they didn't. A mother stared down at her 6-year-old son, who was dying of terminal leukemia. Although her heart was filled with sadness, she also had a strong feeling of determination. Like any parent, she wanted her son to grow up and fulfill all his dreams. Now, that was no longer possible. The leukemia would see to that. But she still wanted her son's dream to come true. She took her son's hand and asked, 'Billy, did you ever think about what you wanted to be once you grew up? Did you ever dream and wish what you would do with your life?' Mommy, 'I always wanted to be a soldier like daddy when I grew up.'

His Mom smiled back and said, 'Let's see if we can make your wish come true.' Later that that week she and her husband through the chain of command that he would come down to the Armories. They got Billy dressed in a little uniform that looked just like the others worn by the soldiers. The Colonel was there and other soldiers and he spent the day on the zipline from the second floor of the armories;

being in the Light Armored Vehicles, watching the repel masters repel down from the top of the building; and even eating from the same MRE field rations. He even loved that! And at the end of it he was presented with a CO's coin.

Having his dream come true, with all the love and attention that was lavished upon him, so deeply touched Billy that he lived three months longer than any doctor thought possible. One night all of his vital signs began to drop dramatically and the head nurse, who believed in the hospice concept; that no one should die alone; began to call the family members to the hospital. Then she remembered the day Billy had spent as a soldier, so she called the Nurse contacted the armoury and asked if it would be possible to send someone in uniform to the hospital to be with Billy as he made his transition.

The CoC was called, and the response was; "We'll be there as soon as we can." About hour later a tap came on the window at the hospital of Billy's third floor open window and as the CO walked into the room the Master Replers climbed in through the window into Billy's room. With his mother and father's permission, they hugged him and held him and told him how much they loved him. [SEP]

With his dying breathe, Billy looked up and asked "am I a real soldier now?' 'Billy, you are, and the General of all the Host of heaven, even Jesus, is holding your hand,' the said. With those words, Billy smiled and said, 'I know, He's been holding my hand all day, and the angels have been singing.' He closed his eyes one last time.

At the funeral these words were read for the little soldier in honour of his fight.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow [SEP] Between the crosses, row on row, [SEP] That mark our place: and in the sky [SEP] The larks still bravely singing fly [SEP] Scarce heard amid the guns below. We are the dead: Short days ago, [SEP] We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, [SEP] Loved and were loved: and now we lie [SEP] In Flanders fields! Take up our quarrel with the foe [SEP] To you, from failing hands, we throw [SEP] The torch: be yours to hold it high [SEP] If ye break faith with us who die, [SEP] We shall not sleep, though poppies grow [SEP] In Flanders fields

You think about that. Amen.