

Sunday, March 11th, 2018

PRELUDE

"Take My Life and Let It Be"

The Handbell Choir

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP

The Choir

"Send Us Forth in Thy Love" - Dan Dykema

After the Choir finishes, the liturgist should step to the lectern & say,

"Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 124 and printed in our bulletins?"

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 124)

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork.

One day tells its tale to another, and one night imparts knowledge to another.

Although they have no words and their voices are not heard,

Their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world.

The commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever;

The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

By them also is your servant enlightened, and in keeping them there is great reward.

Cleanse me from my secret faults and keep your servant from presumptuous sins;

Let them not get dominion over me; then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.

Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight,

O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Let us worship God beginning with a video bringing us the voice of the apostle, Matthias, answering the question that Jesus asks of us all, "Who do you say that I am?"

The video will begin immediately after this introduction.

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

A Video

"Matthias"

EXTINGUISHING THE FOURTH LENTEN CANDLE

Immediately at the conclusion of the video, the Acolyte will extinguish one votive candle.

The Liturgist will then return to the lectern microphone and say...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Holy God, we thank you for this season of Lent, during which you invite us to come, to examine, to confess, to be renewed and healed. We enter this season eagerly, understanding that there are things which need to be lost so that better things may be found. Grant us courage to set aside easy answers and quick fixes in favor of your word that penetrates and transforms. Enable us to see past the immediate satisfaction of our wants so that we may choose instead the eternally fulfilling grace of your presence. Embolden our faith that we may trust you rather than the false and empty promises of our age. May we emerge from this season prepared to serve you with renewed passion and joy. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "Shout to the Lord", which is printed in our bulletins.

The liturgist should step back from the microphone for the hymn.

***HYMN OF PRAISE**

"Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun"

The Hymnal #456

After the hymn, the liturgist will step into the lectern and say...

***CALL TO CONFESSION**

Trusting, with the psalmist, that God is truly good and upright, and willing to teach sinners in God's own ways, let us confess our sins with confidence, seeking God's instruction. Would you join with me as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a moment of silent prayer. Let us pray....

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

(In Unison)

O God, our Father, there are so many things within us which so often keep us from hearing your voice as we ought: Pride, which does not recognize its own need; Self-will, which wants no way but its

own; Willful blindness, which refuses to see what it does not wish to see; Willful deafness, which refuses to hear what it does not wish to hear; False independence, which resents advice; Foolishness, which thinks that it knows best. Take from us everything that would keep us from hearing your voice and help us to listen, to understand, and to obey; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

The apostle Paul tells us, "Because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions — it is by grace we have been saved." ...Friends believe the Good News!

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

*GLORIA PATRI

The Hymnal #579

Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high has broken upon us, giving light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, guiding our feet into the way of peace. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.

After a few moments, the liturgist will step into pulpit and say...

"At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord brought to them by Pastor Mike."

The liturgist will take a seat.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

(All Singing)

***Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.***

Open a box containing the pieces of a model plane. Ask the children if they can see how the pieces go together. Admit that it would be very hard to assemble the model if you only had a box of parts, and you might get very frustrated. Then pull out the instructions, and show them how the instructions provide guidance for the putting together of the pieces. Ask the children if they feel better when they have instructions to look at. Tell them that the people of Israel had returned to their hometown of Jerusalem after living for many years in Babylon, and they didn't know how to live as God's people. Explain that a priest named Ezra showed them "the book of the law of Moses" (Nehemiah 8:1), which was a book of instructions. Say that Ezra read from the book, and others explained it, so that the people "understood the reading" (v. 8); the result was that they cried when they discovered they had been doing things wrong, and they felt happy to have received this set of instructions. Close by saying that the same is true for us today: The Bible is a set of instructions that God has given us to put together the pieces of our lives, and we should be happy to have a book that corrects us when we are wrong & guides us in the ways that are right.

As the children leave, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Every perfect gift is born of God from his perfect and unchanging love. The time has come to respond to that love with our own gifts to advance the gospel of peace. Let us continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.

THE OFFERTORY

"Beside Still Waters" - Christopher Boodle

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

*DOXOLOGY (In Unison)

The Hymnal #592

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;

Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

***OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Let us pray...Lord, as we bring our gifts to you today, we ask you to give us pure hearts. Rid us of pride, greed and thanklessness. We know that all we have is yours, so we give it back to you with joy. Use these gifts to make your name known throughout the world. May our gifts be a sweet, sweet fragrance to you. Amen.

***THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

"The Apostle's Creed"

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick & the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Invite the congregation to... "Be seated." The liturgist will then return to her seat on the Chancel or with his family. Thanks so much for your help!

THE ANTHEM

"Create in Me a Clean Heart" - Arnold B. Sherman

The Choir

After the choir finishes, the Liturgist will step into the pulpit & say...

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the Letter of James, the first chapter beginning with the twenty-first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1054 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

The liturgist will return to his seat with the congregation.

When the liturgist finishes, the preacher will step into the pulpit & say...

Our sermon text for today is taken from the Book of Nehemiah, the eighth chapter, beginning at the first verse. If you would like to follow along in your pew bibles, you can find it on page 420. Listen once more for the Word of God:

"And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithi'ah, Shema, Anai'ah, Uri'ah, Hil-ki'ah, and Ma-asei'ah on his right hand; and Pedai'ah, Mish'a-el, Malchi'jah, Hashum, Hash-bad'danah, Zechari'ah, and Meshul'lam on his left hand.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God; and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“Rebuilding On Your Knees?”

Rev. Mike Morgan

Sixty years ago, Charlton Heston was starting to film a movie that has become known as one of the greatest of all time, a Biblical epic entitled *Ben Hur* that is still known for its climatic chariot race.

In the spirit of authenticity, Heston spent weeks learning to drive the chariot, but he was still worried about the race.

Heston told the stunt coordinator “I can drive the chariot, but I’m not sure I can win.”

The stunt director smiled and said “Chuck, you just make sure you stay in the chariot. I’ll make sure you win the race.”

After years considerable trials and innumerable errors, the Psalmist memorialized this great truth in the first verse of Psalm 127: “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.”

This truth had been lost over the previous 13 decades, as the Hebrew people first lapsed into idolatry and then collapsed under the weight of the Persian invasion into slavery and exile. But now they were back. After 70 years in captivity, God had allowed them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild. The first thing they rebuilt was the temple – completing it 520 B.C.

About 60 years after the rebuilding of the temple, Ezra arrived on the scene and began to rebuild the spiritual life of God’s people.

Today our story is about Nehemiah, the most trusted member of the inner circle of the King of Persia, Artaxerxes. Nehemiah was his cup bearer, responsible for tasting the king’s wine and food, and generally providing for the king’s safety. Today we would think of him as the head of Artaxerxes’ Secret Service-- the last man to see the king every night, and the first man to see the king every morning. After being warned that Jerusalem’s walls have been destroyed, Nehemiah remembers, even after a lifetime in exile, what other Jews had forgotten: **No mess is a match for God’s mercy.**

You can never fall beyond the reach of God’s grace. Your sins can never overwhelm the grace of God. There is nothing he will not do for his people. No burden he will not lift. No error he will not correct.

Your mess is no match for God’s mercy.

When Nehemiah receives a word from the Lord about Jerusalem in Nehemiah 1:3-6, and it fills him with concern and sorrow for his people:

“They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:

“Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his command-ments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you.”

He mourned, fasted, and prayed. He knew what was at stake. This was not just about physical renewal of a city, but spiritual renewal for God’s people.

So Nehemiah begins the task of rebuilding. He begins not with plans or laying a stone foundation, or with framing or bricks and mortar. Rebuilding with God and his people begins with prayer. :

The temptation is so strong when we find ourselves in a mess to ask, “What am I going to do?” Nehemiah goes immediately to the only one who can answer him-- not to the king as you might expect-- but to God.

He begins by reminding himself of who God is. He is a great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of love. Then he asks God to hear his prayer as he confesses sin. If you’re looking for spiritual renewal, a place to start over; Prayer is **the place** to start.

He prays for success with the king and God grants it. Nehemiah, like Esther from last week’s story,

believes so much that this mess is no match for God's mercy, that he puts his life on the line and goes before the king.

Turns out, Nehemiah's faith was well placed. Nehemiah would say, "Because the gracious hand of God was on me, the king granted my requests."

The king actually did much more than that. He sent him with everything he would need for safe travel and with money and materials to rebuild the city walls.

God as he often does, is working through the rulers of nations to write his story.

Because of the safe passage set by the king, Nehemiah makes good time getting to Jerusalem. But here's another lesson in rebuilding. Once again we see this pattern, he doesn't jump to action right away. He prays and observes the situation himself and then and only then does he go to the people.

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." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. *Nehemiah*
2:17-18

The people were eager to get started but not everyone shared their enthusiasm. Some like Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, stood to lose political ground and accused him of rebelling against the king. That obviously wasn't true but when that didn't work they tried to discourage him. Listen to this:

Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!" *Nehemiah 4:3*

Next, Nehemiah's enemies plotted to kill him. As the walls went up, so did the blood pressure of the enemy.

By the way, Sanballats and Tobiahs still roam the earth. Maybe you've met them. Try to do right and they will do you wrong. Try to pull yourself up, they will pull you down. Be prepared, but don't be caught off guard. Notice what Nehemiah did.

He posted entire communities, families, at the lowest points of the wall at the "exposed places" so the work of rebuilding could continue and protect the workers at the same time. Some would have a brick in one hand and a sword or spear in the other.

The same holds true for us. We all have exposed places in our life. Places of vulnerability and weakness. The question is, "Who's standing guard for you?" Are you trying to do life alone or do you have others who can strengthen your defense in the places you're most vulnerable? It's an important question for anyone wanting to start over.

In Nehemiah's case, this strategy frustrated the enemy so much that they never made a move toward the city, its walls, or its workers.

But while God's people had not given up but neither had the enemy. There was one last card to play. One powerful, last ditch effort. It works because most of us never see it coming. We know it as distraction or misdirection. It's the key component of any successful flea-flicker in football, and the secret of the magic in a magicians trick. It's getting you to focus in one place while the action is really happening in another. They simply sought to distract.

If they can't discourage Nehemiah or kill him, they'll distract him.

Nehemiah had rebuilt the walls but not the doors in the gates. So the enemies, Sanballat and Geshem, sent this message:

"Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it & go down to you?" *Neh 6:2-3*

Don't you just love that question? Why should I go down to you? Don't you know I am carrying on a great project?

Do you wish you had a great project? You do. It doesn't matter if you're single, married, raising children, empty nester, rich or poor. You've been given a great project.

It might be raising children, mentoring someone, or being mentored. It might be to become more like Jesus... to pray with or for a coworker. It might be a simple invitation to a neighbor to come with you next week. It's probably not rebuilding a wall, but it might be helping to rebuild a life-- maybe even starting with your own. And because your mess is no match for God's mercy, you can know, just like Nehemiah, he will fight for you.

And did God ever fight for his people. They finished the wall and set the doors in place in a mere 52 days. This was unheard of. How did they respond? Did they pat each other on the back? Did they gather and say, and the award for best wall building strategy goes to, Ezra. Sorry. Wrong envelope. Nehemiah! No. They knew where to give honor. Notice what they did. They worshipped.

Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worship the Lord with their faces to the ground. Nehemiah 8:6

The race to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem had been won. Not because of their hard work or superior construction skills. Those advantages had yielded very little before Nehemiah had arrived to remind them that unless God builds the house, those who labor, do so in vain. Our job is to get on our knees and ask him to take over our project, and go back to our knees often enough to get new instruction and to keep ourselves focused. And when it is all done, to return to our knees again and give thanks in worship. We are modern day Ben Hurs-- we don't have to worry about winning the race-- God has taken care of that. Our job is to build from our knees.

God was faithful to guide Nehemiah and he is the same God who will faithfully guide you.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me...

Lord, we know that we can do without many of the things that we once thought of as necessities, but without you we cannot live, and we dare not die. However great our talents, our strengths, and our abilities we know that they are insufficient to overcome many of the obstacles that confront us from within and without. So it is only right we thank you for your presence with us and your power at work within us and around us, conquering the unconquerable and overcoming evil with good.

Whenever we have cried out to You, You have heard and you have answered our call. We give You our gratitude for that constant sense of need that keeps us close beside you. Help us to keep our hands in Yours and our ears open to the wisdom of your voice.

Speak to us, that we may hear you giving us courage for hard times and strength for difficult places; giving us determination for challenging tasks. we ask of you no easy way, but just your grace that is sufficient for every need, so that no matter how hard the way, how challenging the hour, how dark the sky. we may be enabled to overcome and glorify you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and who taught us to pray saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand & join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name", hymn #142 in our *Hymnal*.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION "O Jesus, I Have Promised" *The Hymnal #389*

*THE BENEDICTION

*CHORAL RESPONSE "Sanctuary"

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, Pure and holy, tried and true;
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for You.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis