

## WELCOME 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021 – 12 Pentecost '21 B

Nehemiah 6:1-19

**Welcome!** It's great to be together. As has become our custom there are **Group** Study & Discussion resources for you to use *over the course of the week. As God leads you into the fullness of His word/work in your life he will then introduce you to someone who needs to hear the good news from you. Also... somewhere here today you may feel a nudge - tap - tug. Don't ignore it! That's probably the Holy Spirit prompting you some way. Let's talk about that after worship.*

*GBO (Interserve) & Morning Tea & something special for youngest among us!*

**As we move into this week...** Sports enthusiasts know it happens. The lead **car** hits the wall or runs out of fuel in the last lap. A penalty **kick** is blocked or swings wide. The **last** ball of the last over clears the boundary for 6 & a match is decided. A **runner**/rider celebrates too soon & they're overtaken in the last 100<sup>th</sup> of a second.

It's not enough to start something...you have to finish...and finish well. Nehemiah is in the home stretch of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. He can see the finish in record time. But it's at **that** moment that we're all vulnerable. It's at **that** moment, w/ the end in sight that **distractions** pose the greatest threat.

To resist distraction & carry out the work to which God calls us honours God, blesses people, & demonstrates God's rule to the world in such a way that enemies are defeated & outsiders are drawn into God's salvation.

Nehemiah is not just rebuilding a wall or a city; he's restoring God's people to their God-designed purpose, call & work in **HIS** world. And nothing can distract from or interfere with that effort reaching its completion.

**"Should** someone in my position run from danger?

Should someone in my position enter the Temple to save his life?

*No, I won't do it!"*

We'll experience & share that together. Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

## PRAYER OF THE DAY:

**"God's** strength behind you,  
His concern for you,  
His love within you,  
and His arms beneath you  
are more than sufficient  
for the job ahead of you."

-- William Arthur Ward

Heavenly Father in all things let us hear but one voice, yours. Obey but one command, yours. Pursue one call, yours. Kneel before one will, yours. Offer our lives to one glory, yours. Share one hope...that found in Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

Let's read today's litany responsively...

## **FAITH CHAT:**

1. What are some parts of your life you are hoping to "finish well"? Don't say "all of it."
2. Where right now would you say you are "unfinished," & fighting distractions?

## 12 Pentecost – '21 B – ROAD TO RECOVERY: RESIST DISTRACTION

**Lori** (Lolo) Jones was a US Olympic Hurdler & Bobsled Racer. She was favoured to win the 100-meter hurdles at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. She was peaking at just the right time. When the finals starter pistol fired, she took a commanding lead, but she clipped the **9<sup>th</sup> hurdle** & stumbled. Ultimately finished 7<sup>th</sup>. She'd run every previous race w/ misstep & cleared the 1<sup>st</sup> 8 hurdles in the finals...but the next to last hurdle ruined a perfect **finish**. We know...you have to finish well. Not just to win a race...but to live into God's call...marriage, parenting education or vocation...Finishing well is critical...in every part of life...

Today we find Nehemiah at the 9<sup>th</sup> hurdle. The wall around Jerusalem is almost finished...all that's left are gates & bars. But the enemies who wanted Jerusalem to remain weak vulnerable faltering unfulfilled...who wanted Nehemiah to fail & God's people to remain aimless & complacent redoubled their efforts to stop the work.

What we read this morning, Ch 6, is a testimony to **distraction**. Sanballat/Tobiah/Geshem should have their pictures by the word in the dictionary. From the time Neh arrived in Jerusalem they dished out mockery, scorn, plots of violence, threats of attack. They'd tried everything to hinder/halt the work of rebuilding. Now, as the work nears completion they give it their best shot w/ 3 major efforts at distraction...

**Compromise**...**Intimidation**...**Betrayal**...The distractions matter but I really want you to see how Neh & you & I can deal w/ those undaunted & w/ laser-focused-faith get on w/ the work God has assigned us

Let's start w/ **Compromise**...1<sup>st</sup> this isn't about being stubborn - hard-headed - never giving someone else's opinion a hearing... COMPROMISE in **this** context means to step away from what God has said – commanded – called toward some other path person or goal.

**Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, & the rest of our enemies found out I had finished rebuilding the wall & no gaps remained — though we had not yet set up the doors in the gates. So Sanballat & Geshem sent a message asking me to meet them at one of the villages (Hakkephirim) in the plain of Ono.**

For all the world this looks harmless...his antagonists might well be making an overture toward an alliance. Neh has succeeded where they hoped he'd fail, so maybe he'll make a good ally. Maybe this is the time to build some bridges into the neighbouring tribes & perhaps develop some economic partnerships that benefit the whole region. Scholars say Ono & Hakkephirim was an area where skilled craftsmen lived. (11:35) Maybe this is a perfect chance to recruit some of them to work on the gates & doors in the wall or on the finer-craft-pieces of the Temple. **AND** Ono's only 30-35Ks from Jerusalem...a couple of days over & back...long-weekend get away from the pressure of the wall.

But **Compromise** is always a small step in the wrong direction...

**Amos 3:3** - *Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?* From the outset these guys mocked the rebuilding of the wall & the nation. They were a perpetual pebble in Neh's sandal so he said: **"The God of heaven will help us succeed. We, his servants, will start rebuilding this wall. But you have no share, legal right, or historic claim in Jerusalem."** They aren't part of the Covenant. They don't share the call God has planted in the hearts/lives of his people. They at no point support wholeheartedly the vision Neh brought to God's people in Jerusalem to lift them from ruin/rubble/rut.

To move toward people whose lives are opposed to God's work is a step in the wrong direction. Paul says: **2 Cor 6:14** - *Don't team up (unequally yoked) with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness?* It's always about alignment of core values beliefs hearts...Business partner or decision a workmate or the dating/mating possibilities our young people face **OF COURSE** we develop friendships even close ones w/ those who do not yet trust in Christ...but in the intimate spaces of hearts & lives, when we are serious about being the fullness of Christ's body & life here on earth so the world can see him in us...Compromise more often than not is down/away from the call promises life commands God gives his people. Neh avoids that downward pull. He knew he had nothing in common w/ people who were continually working against his call from God. Sometimes the pagan world **will** get on board/facilitate your vision...But when they won't there is no common ground for cooperation. Defend your call vs compromise.

**How?** Discernment & Determination - **I realized they were plotting to harm me, so I replied by sending this message: "I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come. Why should I stop working to come & meet with you?"** Nehemiah is not just rebuilding a wall or a city; he's restoring God's people to their God-designed purpose, call & work in **HIS** world. To resist distraction & carry out the work to which God calls us honours God, blesses people, & demonstrates God's rule to the world in such a way that enemies are defeated & outsiders are drawn into God's salvation.

In Acts 20...Paul is winding up his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary expedition. He's taking an offering back to Jerusalem for the poor & everyone around him senses by the Holy Spirit this is a dangerous trip...nothing bodes well. On the docks @ Ephesus, Paul gives his final farewell to the church there & he's warned again Jerusalem = bad news. He says: **"And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me, except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail & suffering lie ahead. But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus — the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God. — 20:22-24** Great work & if I falter for a moment my life is worth nothing to me. D & D I know what's coming...but I can't let that slow me down.

You notice...Sanballat, Tobiah & Geshem don't give up...They just keep it up. Neh knows what that is... **Intimidation**...4X that word appears here...We know intimidation...compel a certain behaviour by threat, force or manipulation. **They** were just trying to intimidate us, imagining they could discourage us & stop the work. (make our hands weak) So I continued the work with even greater determination. But I prayed, "Now O God, strengthen my hands." Discernment. Determination. **But now**... Prayer & Persistence. I love how Neh prays...immediate, specific & effective. Do you pray like that? Do you just stop what you're doing, acknowledge the attack threat enemy & pray for strength at the point of attack? Do you pray & claim the promises of God in the Scriptures & the call of God for God's purposes in your life? Just like when S-T-G threatened full-on frontal assault: **But we** prayed to our God & guarded the city day & night to protect ourselves. God's in charge. We have work to do. P & P

Compromise – Intimidation...bad enough, but I reckon the deepest cut came from the **Betrayal** by those inside Jerusalem. Shemaiah is inside the walls. He benefits from a safe strong city. The nobles & elites who kept colluding w/ Tobiah are those Neh has had to rein in in their \$\$ dealings...they're on the inside. They benefit from a strong safe city. They benefit from a renewed sense of mission & purpose & meaning to their lives & their city. They benefit if the people of God are renewed & re-engaged in their work lives & relationship w/ God that God intends for them. All their "boats rise on the same tide." How does Neh/we deal w/ yet another distraction? **Clarity & Confidence**... "**Should** someone in my position run from danger? Should someone in my position enter the Temple to save his life? No, I won't do it!"... Remember, O my God, all the evil things Tobiah & Sanballat have done. And remember Noadiah the prophet & all the prophets like her who have tried to intimidate me.

Neh is clear/confident: **HE** is **WHO** he is **WHERE** he is because **GOD** put him there. That's you I get to hang out w/ parents at various stages in the parenting process & I am constantly drawn back to **Luther's** understanding of parenthood/family as that place where the next generation is made acquainted w/ the gospel. *The greatest good in married life, that which makes all suffering & labour worthwhile, is that God grants offspring & commands they be brought up to worship & serve him. In all the world this is the noblest & most precious work...father & mother are apostles, bishops, & priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel.* You **ARE NOT** your child's BFF, coach, business adviser, get out of jail free card...you may do some of all of that...but as father/mother you are apostle/bishop/priest for the next generation...The highest call of a parent is to see faith in Jesus flourish in their family. That's the call of every parent...faith flourishes into the next generation.

What happens when Neh/we drive back distractions w/ Discernment/Dedication, Prayer/Persistence, & Clarity/Confidence?

**So** on October 2<sup>nd</sup> the wall was finished—just 52 days after we had begun. When our enemies & the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened & humiliated. (fell much in their own eyes) They realized this work had been done with the help of our God. There are some studies that suggest up to 1/2 of a working day is made up dealing w/ distractions...all the things you didn't set out to do when you got out of bed that day (phone calls, emails, glitches in the system, problems you didn't know existed until they hit, customers who like to chat, flat tires, computer garbage) When you reclaim who you are & why you are doing what God has set b/4 you...What happens is Neh clears the 9<sup>th</sup> **AND** 10<sup>th</sup> hurdles. He finishes this part of the race...this part of his call from God In. Record. Time.

S-T-G had been so cocky so intimidating so threatening so fear-inducing...but all that came to a screeching halt once the wall doors & gates were in place. And notice who gets the credit...not Neh...God. In the way Neh & the workers handled the 3-pronged attack of Compromise-Intimidation-Betrayal the enemies are defeated. Suddenly God's presence/power are visible in a way the whole countryside can see. Nehemiah is not just rebuilding a wall or a city; he's restoring God's people to their God-designed purpose, call & work in **HIS** world. **"I will** make you a light to the Gentiles, & you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." – Is 49:6

**"I, the LORD,** have called you to demonstrate my righteousness. I will take you by the hand and guard you...And you will be a light to guide the nations." – Is 42:6 To resist distraction & carry out the work to which God calls us honours God, blesses people, & demonstrates God's rule to the world in such a way that enemies are defeated & outsiders are drawn into God's salvation.

The cool part about what we're seeing...there are no overt miracles. Parted seas, hailstones from heaven, multiplied lunchboxes...just faithful work in the name of the God who set this people apart for himself & his purposes here & now. God acts! Discernment/Dedication, Prayer/Persistence, & Clarity/Confidence & in that daily devotion to the vision God carried for his people & commanded be renewed in this generation everybody knew it was of God...

**"You** are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp & then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

**Take it home...**

This week...What would have to happen in your life for people to know that your "work has been done by the help of God"? What distractions need to be defeated – light needs to shine... 30 secs... **Go**...I'll pray for us to close...