

WELCOME 22nd August 2021 – 13 Pentecost '21 B

Nehemiah 8:1-12

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... It's the long forgotten thing on a shelf... the old photo from years ago...the Mother's/Father's Day "craft/gift" from pre-school days & the memories flood in. It's the story **BEHIND** the story that reaches your emotions, reconnects you to your past, regrounds your present & reorients your future.

For the people of Israel, this is that moment. The walls are rebuilt & their hearts are being renewed. But only as they reengage the Word of God, does the Road to Recovery come into focus. When people gather to hear & understand God's Word in the context of their daily lives, they discover the story behind the story; a story that revives their appetite for God, reinvigorates their worship, & restores their community...And that community is commissioned to live from overflowing joy that releases healing, blessing & life to the world. Joy healing blessing & life equal to the crying need in our hearts & in our community right now.

*"Go & celebrate with a feast of rich foods & sweet drinks, & share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord.
Don't be dejected & sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!"*

Remember:

Nehemiah is not just rebuilding a wall or a city;
he is restoring God's people to their God-designed purpose, call & work in **HIS** world.
Every word of every one of these weeks is aimed straight at us.

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

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you! I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy...through Jesus Christ, our Lord... Amen.

Now let's hear God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. Today...what is one thing for which you are incredibly thankful?
2. What is something you have recently learned from God's Word that is shaping how you live? Bible verse? Lesson? Insight?
3. "*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*" How are you finding this true at this time?

13 Pentecost – '21 B – ROAD TO RECOVERY: RESTORE COMMUNITY

The Westminster Catechism, the Presbyterian/reformed equivalent of Luther's Catechism, is a laundry list of 107 questions about the Xn faith w/ 227 footnotes/explanatory proof-texts from the Bible to support the appointed/correct answers to each of the 107 questions. That's not how I would go about imparting faith from one generation to another...questions/approved answers...**BUT** the 1st question always strikes me as being absolutely right on target: What is the chief end of man? what are they asking? What's our purpose here on earth? Why are humans here in the first place? What's the point of drawing breath as a human being? The answer: To glorify God, & to enjoy him forever.

I love that because truth is...that's the purpose of every created thing ...to point back to God the Father - Creator Designer Origin - of all things offering thanks praise worship & devotion **AND** to delight in the reality that the Father finds pleasure – he delights in all he has made...God delights in - finds pleasure in - enjoys *us*. We get that as followers of Jesus...as Xns we are to live in a restored relationship w/ God through Jesus such that our lives reflect his image/presence/power/purpose in all we are & do so that others are drawn into the delight/joy of that restored relationship To glorify God, & to enjoy him forever – point to the Father as the source & object of all love joy hope satisfaction wholeness delight through Jesus Christ...

JOY is at the heart of what it means to live in Christ...In Jn 17...w/in hours of being crucified Jesus is eating his final Passover w/ his disciples & in his final hour his burden was not for the suffering awaiting him but for us...the entire prayer Jesus offers to the Father is about us...us. Right @ the center of that prayer *Jn 17:13* Jesus says, *Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was w/ them in this world so my joy would be made complete in them. (filled w/ - full measure)* **JOY** is at the heart of what it means to live in Christ.

Now what does that have to do w/ Nehemiah?

You gotta see this...where did we end last week...Chap 6...So on October 2 the wall was finished—just 52 days after we had begun. When our enemies & the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened & humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God.

When you reclaim who you are & why you are doing what God has set b/4...when you truly live out your reason for being alive...glorify God, & to enjoy him forever – point to the Father as the source & object of all love joy hope satisfaction delight & wholeness through Jesus Christ...God's image/presence/power/purpose are visible in a way the whole countryside can see. When they begin to live out who God has called them to be God is honoured, the people are blessed & God's rule over all things is demonstrated in such a way that enemies are defeated & outsiders are drawn into God's salvation.

*They realized this work had been done with the help of our God...The whole countryside can see...is in awe...marvels...senses SomeOne bigger than Ezra or Nehemiah has their hand on the wheel...But so also did every man woman & child in & around Jerusalem...every builder every Levite every priest every farmer everyone who mixed mortar or shaped stones or cleared rubble or hammered iron for the gates & bars in the doors...every one of them realized God had somehow enabled every safe moment. God had kept them from harm, injury or illness. God had thwarted every trick of their enemies. God had subverted every underhanded scheme of the betrayers inside the walls...And w/in **THEM** arose a memory of something long ago forgotten... w/in **THEM** arose a memory of who they were & why they were... w/in **THEM** arose the sense that this is just the beginning...& there was more for them...*

We kinda know what that feels like...Every now & then you find an photo of your kids when they're little...wedding album...deed to your first house or the family farm...you go back to your old favourite place & look out at where you used to “__.” Deep inside there's a stirring...an echo of who you used to be or wanted to be...reminder why you stayed married...faith you used to cherish...dream you carried of living to see “this”...& you know you have to honour the fire beginning to burn inside again. So did the Israelites...*All the people assembled w/ a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey.*

We noted last week there was nothing obviously miraculous in rebuilding the wall... Just 52 days of unrelenting faithful hard work. 52 days of rubble carted off. Rocks moved. Mortar mixed. Stone set upon stone. Guarding against attack. Day/Day/Day 52 days of unrelenting faithful hard work. In the faithful work in the name of the God who set this people apart for himself & his purposes here & now: God was moving! 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...

So did the Israelites & even after they've gone back to their homes & farms & villages & lives they gather w/o any summons from Neh or Ez...w/o any indication something was planned...*w/ a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate & asked Ezra to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey.* For 5-6 hours Ezra read & other priests & Levites repeated it so folks at the back could hear & others translated from Hebrew to more common Aramaic & taught & explained so folks would understand & know what it meant for their lives... God had moved among them so they began to finally pay attention & grapple w/ what it would take for them to truly live the responsive/obedient lives God intended.

They knew the stories. They knew their ancestors had been exiled because they disobeyed the law of God. From the brokenness of those stories, & the brokenness of the walls & the brokenness & emptiness & fragility of their own lives they knew they needed God to restore them as surely as they needed to rebuild the walls & the Temple. When they heard God's word proclaimed/applied, they wept because they heard their sins spoken aloud knowing they are not innocent, but guilty. As their ancestors were ^{b/4} the exile; they are now...self-indulgent, complacent, idolatrous. They wept fearing death & justice from God who strikes down the guilty. They wept not knowing how to break the patterns of sin that have set into their hearts like the mortar ^{b/t} the stones in the wall. They wept not knowing how to bridge the gulf that separates sinful humanity from the faithful God who made them for himself.

But as surely as God's Word shows us our sin, it also reveals the source of our hope; & they heard again of the God who 1st bridged the gulf in his covenant w/ Abe; who promised Jacob "*I am w/ you & I will protect you everywhere you go*" (Gen 28:15); who heard the cry of his people enslaved in Egypt & delivered them from bondage; who is slow to anger filled w/ unfailing love & forgives sins (Ex 34:5-7); who lifts up his people when their strength is gone (Deut 32:36); who keeps his promises.

Not in the Temple, but in the city square by the only gate scholars say was not destroyed when the city was sacked by the Babylonians...in the very heart of what would be the heartbeat of community life...they are reminded of the God who has chosen them out of all the nations on earth. God had driven them into exile, but He brought them back. He led them home to rebuild the temple, the walls, the city & life in his city: Jerusalem. They were the people of God & that blessing was God's to grant & he had not withdrawn his hand from them.

They might be a small, or seemingly insignificant but they were God's own. All around them were signs of God's love for them, His care for them in providing for them. Hearing God's word, revives their appetite for God, reinvigorates their worship, & restores their community...And that community is commissioned to live from overflowing joy that releases healing, blessing & life to the world.

"Don't mourn or weep on such a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the Lord your God...Go & celebrate with a feast of rich foods & sweet drinks, & share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected & sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!" **Do. NOT. MISS. THIS.** Nehemiah sends the people out on mission; to take what they just received & bless their city. Nehemiah tells them to go eat foods that make your Dr gasp & drink good wine (none of that cask stuff) **AND ABOVE ALL SHARE IT** w/ those who don't yet have it.

Hearing God's word, revives their appetite for God, reinvigorates their worship, & restores their community...And that community is commissioned to live from overflowing joy that releases healing, blessing & life to the world. Go! Celebrate! Rejoice & throw a party! ***AND ABOVE ALL*** invite others into the joy you've received.

In this season when we are locked down harder than we have been & maybe feeling lonelier & less than you've ever felt...Hear that word that promise that assurance. God has **NOT** forsaken us. God has **NOT** forgotten us. God has **NOT** abandoned His covenant. He has **NOT** broken His promise. Despite all the turmoil & rubbish our world seems to dredge up with each new day. Despite all the wretchedness & selfishness & faithlessness of this world. Despite the ever-present & ever-broadcast alarm about how we're all doomed or about to die...no virus or genocide or human-induced convulsion on this planet gets to speak the last word over you or me or anything else.

That last Word is God's in Jesus Christ. That Word guarantees life & love w/o end; joy & hope unsurpassed, satisfaction & delight to the depth of your soul, healing & wholeness greater than any disaster of this life...That Word silences death. That Word routs the evil one. That Word crushes hell to dust & ashes and That Word restores you & me in a community that lasts in joy forever. And this community ***OUR*** community Living Water Fellowship is commissioned to live from overflowing joy that releases healing, blessing & life to the world. Go! Celebrate! Rejoice & throw a party! ***AND ABOVE ALL*** invite others into the joy you've received.

"Go & celebrate with a feast of rich foods & sweet drinks, & share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected & sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!"

Take it home...

True community is built on the Word of God.

Who is one person in the wider community you can ask to read the word of God with you on a weekly basis? 30 secs... **Go...** I'll pray for us to close...

Your Word, O God is a lamp to our feet & a light to our path. Your Word, O God became flesh & lived among us full of grace & truth, and unfailing love & faithfulness. Your Word, O God reveals you to us & brings us safely home to you. Plant your Word deep within us & grow it into a harvest that lasts forever...In whatever darkness we encounter, or temptations we face; teach us to obey your Word & walk in your ways...through Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.