

14th January, 2024

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

Hail, Thou Source of every blessing,
Sovereign Father of mankind!
Gentiles now, Thy grace possessing,
In Thy courts admission find.
Grateful now we fall before Thee,
In Thy Church obtain a place,
Now by faith behold Thy glory,
Praise Thy truth, adore Thy grace.

Once far off, but now invited,
We approach Thy sacred throne;
In Thy covenant united,
Reconciled, redeemed, made one.



Responding to God's Love

Now revealed to Eastern sages,
See the Star of Mercy shine;
Mystery hid in former ages,
Mystery great of love divine.

Hail, Thou all-inviting Savior!
Gentiles now their offerings bring;
In Thy temple seek Thy favor,
Jesus Christ, our Lord and King.
May we, body, soul, and spirit,
Live devoted to Thy praise,
Glorious realms of bliss inherit,
Grateful anthems ever raise!

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read Nehemiah 2:1-11 and Luke 11:1-13 – Ask and it shall be given

Four hundred and fifty years before Jesus, Jerusalem in ruins. The temple has been built but, the city and the people are humiliated and oppressed by the surrounding people. Instead of (read) Psalm 48:1-3, they are in disgrace. The walls are broken down, there are no boundaries. No protection, so any wealth is at risk from others helping themselves. But more importantly, their faith is at risk from, with a lack of understanding of the truth about God, and his law, which is for the fulness of life. Other seemingly plausible ideas undermine their whole-hearted commitment to God and his Word.

Last week we mentioned 1 Corinthians 10:11. *'These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.'*

There is a parallel with our age? The ‘walls’ of the church, and perhaps our individual lives are broken down. We are in ‘poverty’ in comparison to past glory years, we represent a tiny fraction of the people. We are struggling to grasp the truth of God and His plans and purposes for us. The truth of God and his word is being constantly undermined by alternative ideas. We are in danger of being – read Ephesians 4:14.

God wants his church to become mature, and he invites and he uses Nehemiah, and us, if we will respond, to participate in this building. Read Ephesians 4:11-14.

So what can we learn?

1. Nehemiah Prays.

Nehemiah has done the ground work. He has prayed and fasted for 4 months in the lead up to this moment before the king. He has been persistent in prayer and patient for the opportunity. When it comes, he prays an arrow prayer, risks his life and speaks.

Why a risk? To be sad in the king’s presence, gave the impression of dissatisfaction with the king – it was treated as treason. And, it sought a change in the Artaxerxes’ former edict. Re-building the walls had been attempted a few years before, but a series of letters from the surrounding objectors had resulted in this same king (Ezra 4) ordering the work to stop – now Nehemiah was going to ask the king to change his mind! Many things can’t be fixed, but God does the impossible!

Nehemiah responds to the king with honesty about why he's sad. Nehemiah is polite, he shows respect – read 1 Peter 3:14-16. Nehemiah was *prepared* – he'd thought through what he would say if asked. Hence the detailed response to 'how long?' and 'what's needed?'

2. Nehemiah makes the most of the opportunity.

As Esther did. Esther, the Jewish orphan, who became Queen to Artaxerxes' father! Esther was challenged by her uncle and guardian that, '*for such a time as this*' she had come to power. She risked her life, knowing the previous queen had been dethroned for a failure of respect and etiquette, and she approached the king without an invitation, to save her people.

Nehemiah makes the most of the opportunity. As others before him and since, including Jesus and Paul did, and as we're invited to – read Colossians 5:5-6

3. Nehemiah asks boldly!

He asks for an overturning of the previous edict and that he might be sent himself to put things right.

4. Nehemiah uses testimony – he tells his story – and God's story:

He tells the king the story of his ancestors, and the people the story of how the king granted his mandate. And Nehemiah points to God, see verses 8 and 18.

5. Nehemiah has authority.

Nehemiah's trump card is not his mandate from the king, but his authority from God see verse 20. He dismisses the enemies – their past, present and future, right to Jerusalem and its prosperity. And that there is acceptance of his plan from such a ragtag bunch of people is as miraculous as the 'yes' from Artaxerxes.

Can we make the best of every opportunity...

Will we offer up prayer? In Alpha on Monday, we were reminded of Archbishop William Temple comment, "*When I pray, coincidences happen. When I don't, they don't.*"

Will we tell our story and God's story in confidence that '*The God of heaven will give us success.*' (:20)?

We are now citizens of Zion, children of Abraham, because of Jesus, and we are therefore, inheritors of the heavenly city – the great city, the dwelling place of God, and the joy of the whole earth. This city is now glimpsed in the glory of the church and in us. We are the temples of the Holy Spirit, being built into a Holy temple of the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 6:19, and 1 Peter 2:5).

If God be for us, who can be against us. One with God has always been a majority. Like Nehemiah the former waiter, turned builder and leader of God's people, we are challenged to rebuild the 'walls' of our lives and our church – seeing lives transformed and the transforming of our communities and world.

The Second Sunday of Epiphany: Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Tea and Chat: Jan 17th at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: Jan 17th at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: Jan 24th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: TBA.
- Four Marks & Medstead Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday.
- COGS Tots and Tinytots are on Mondays.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.