

Dedication Sunday – 22 February 2009

[Please note these are unedited preaching notes and are not for publication. They are made available here to aid the deaf community in Christ Church and to be a reference for anyone who found the sermons useful.]

Nehemiah 12:27-43

Well we have heard that amazing reading from Nehemiah of the dedication of the Walls of Jerusalem. I have found this an amazingly rich passage of scripture to study and reflect on as we have prepared for this Dedication Sunday. God has spoken powerfully to me through it and I want to high light a few things for us as we come to make our Dedication to God today as members of Christ Church.

The first thing that struck me about this passage was that so many people are named in it. That may make it a bit a mission to read, but what it says is that Nehemiah knew the people involved by name and knew how they were related. It speaks of community and sense of being connected and belonging with each person recognized known and valued.

So for fun I thought I would rewrite this passage in drop it into our context. With a large degree of license Nehemiah 12:27ff could read could read like this ...

(verse 27) On Dedication Sunday at Christ Church Kenilworth the call went out from Duncan and Pastorate to gather the congregation for a joyful celebration with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of guitar and organ (it is being repaired at present but it will be back in full song soon) so the call to gather the congregation for a joyful celebration with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of guitar and trumpets, drums and cymbals, piano and flutes, and violins and saxophones.

(Verse 28 and 29) The musicians and worshippers gathered at Christ Church in Kenilworth from Plumstead and Pinelands, Rondebosch and Rosebank, Constantia and Claremont, Wynberg and Wetton, Newlands and Noordhoek, Bergvliet and Bothasig. They all gathered in the church on the 22nd day of the month of February and were joined by those who were affirming their membership of Christ Church for the first time.

(verse 30) The leaders of the Christ Church - Duncan, Jeremy, John and the Wardens - declared a day of prayer and fasting for the Friday before. From very

early in the morning they confessed their sins to one another and prayed that God would cleanse and purify them so that they could give themselves to the responsibility entrusted to them of leading the church. Then they spent the day in prayer and prayed for and with members of the church who came to confess their sins and prepare themselves in prayer for the Dedication.

(verse 31) There were two choirs (in fact one choir and whole load of worship bands) who were assigned to lead the congregations, children's church and youth church in exuberant praise.

(From here on it gets a bit freer – bear with me) The Youth Church Worship Band were in Callow House across the road through the metal gate. The Children's Church Worship band was upstairs in the Annex above the kitchen ovens. At the 8am choir was preparing in the Vestry which is at the back of church near the dustbin gate.

All the worship leaders, singers and musicians gathered together - Gaby, Stu, Mark and Matt (the son of Dave & Susan), as well as Ross the son of the other Matt who is the son of Aileen were on the one side. Fritz, Julian, and the brothers Miller - Nic and Daniel, Sarah and Sarah-Jane, Rose and David and Tyrone and Jo were playing a range of instruments. They were under the direction of Tim the father of Beth. He led them all in joyful up beat music.

The morning choir had a different musical style and they approached the church from the Bruce Evans Room across the lawn and in the side door. The singers included Tony, Peter, John, Seung and Rory as well as Sally, Angelika, Ev and Judy, Pippa, Sheila and Felicity the wife of Jim. There was Jean on the organ and Liz on violin. They were under the direction of Richard from Rondebosch and they led the congregation in joyful praise.

The harmony both musically and spiritually was amazing. The choir and the worship bands gave thanks and took their places in the church; so did all the Pastorate - Paul, Marc and Rene – Margie, Hilary, Christy – Tim, Neil and Eva – along with John, Duncan and Jeremy.

The church was full – Graham and Erica, Gerry and Gill, Mike and Abi, Andrew from Vancouver, Jeremy and Duncan the youngsters, there was family Kerr, family Jobson and Jobling, extended Wood Mathew clan...

Ty, Lisa and Richard and Gill and others from Zimbabwe.

Barbara and Hilary and the Children's Church leaders were there as well and the sound of ampted worship from the Youth n Callow House could be heard all over Kenilworth. In fact the punters at the J&B Met asked if the volume could be turned down the worship was so loud and so exuberant.

Okay you get the picture. So that is the first thing that struck me – a **community of people connected and belonging** with each person recognized known and valued with wonderful exuberant worship.

The second thing

that struck me is that the **Walls of Jerusalem represented their security**. They were built to protect them and keep them safe.

But the message was clearly conveyed to the people that God was their security. The walls in and of themselves would not keep them safe. The only real and lasting safety was in faithfully trusting obeying God. God used the walls but that was just part of the picture

Also note that **they built** the walls. The Walls were the fruit of their labour, sweat and toil, their commitment and sacrifice. They were built because God gave a clear instruction to Nehemiah while he was still in Exile that he had to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. So the building f the walls was not a mere whim and a fancy. It was a God directed task, carefully and faithfully lead by Nehemiah – a man who listened carefully to God and with great wisdom lead and inspired the people.

That is a challenge to me and those of you who share leadership with me in here at Christ Church.

Let me ask you this question.

What is our security? What do we look to to keep us safe?

To a large degree it is our money - our investments, assets, insurance and retirement policies. Like the Walls of Jerusalem they are where we have invested our time and effort, labour and toil, our commitments and sacrifices.

These can be amassed with no reference to God at all of course. But I know that you have thought and prayed and over the years sought Godly advice and guidance as you have made your financial plans and commitments.

Two more things to note ...

First,

where as they had built the Walls of Jerusalem they saw them as **God's gift to them**. They thanked God for the Walls now complete. Walls they had laboured to build, they saw as a gift from God.

Second,

they **dedicated them to God** with (as it says in verse 43) great rejoicing and great sacrifices because God had given them great joy. The word "great" is repeated almost as many times as the word "rejoicing".

So this is what I believe God is setting before us as we come to our day of Dedication.

We dedicate ourselves to ... (5 things)

1. To be a community of people where individuals are known, recognized and valued, each one playing their part. A place where people are connected and linked in through Connect Groups, Small Groups and Cells Groups; through Mentoring and Spiritual Direction and sharing in ministry as Children's Church and Ambassador Leaders.
2. To be a team of leaders who seek God's cleansing in our own lives so that we can lead with honesty and integrity so that we can grow as a people of God in this place - holy and set apart for the Lord knowing our selves pardoned and forgiven, restored and being made whole by God's grace and healing.
3. A community of people who work hard and give great commitment to our work and toil serving the wider community and our neighbours in the process of our daily work as teachers, doctors, lawyers and those working in civil service, business and industry – working for the education of our children, healing of the sick, the growth of the economy, and the health of our society so that it can be a safer place.
4. We dedicate ourselves to be a community of worshippers who recognize that all we have comes from God and we dedicate it all to him, who is alone our security and hope. And we do this very great exuberant ampted rejoicing.
5. It's a party and God is the midst of it all!

That is what today is about. And what we are saying in our Dedication as we place our membership forms and pledge cards before the Lord ... this is what we are saying to God and to one another.

- I am in.
- I want to be a part of this community, of this fellowship of believers. I want to place myself under the spiritual oversight of the leaders of this church.
- All I have is God's – the fruit of my labour and toil – God enable, gifted and gave me the opportunity – it is all from him. I dedicate it all to him with very great, exuberant, ampted rejoicing. A portion of all I earn I dedicate to God to be used here at Christ Church.
- I am up for hard work in the place God has placed me – I will honour serve him there.
- Praise God he has dealt with my sin. He has dealt with my past and set me free. I want to follow Jesus. I want to do that as part of this community with the help and support of these brothers and sister in Christ. I will play my part.
- I am in. I am up for the party.

Now before the music and celebration begin what I would to do is to ask a few people to come and tell us ...

- how have you got connected here at Christ Church, and
- what has God taught you about following Jesus?