

**Sunday, October 15, 2017 – Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Preacher: Rev. Douglas J. Brouwer**

**Scripture: Nehemiah 4:9-23 and Philippians 4:6-7**

**Sermon title: “Discouragement: Its causes and cure”**

Note: On September 10, I began a sermon series based on the Book of Nehemiah, with guidance and insight provided by the “minor classic” *Hand Me Another Brick*, a book by the American pastor Charles R. Swindoll. The readings from Nehemiah will be the focus of the sermon, with the second reading providing further illumination or insight.

1. Last week focused our attention on criticism, which is not an easy topic to think about, but neither is this week’s topic ... discouragement. Last week Nehemiah found himself the target of criticism from his enemies, and this week he realizes that the criticism is taking a toll on his workers (and their families).

Swindoll is very helpful in identifying causes for discouragement. Here is his list (perhaps you can think of others):

- a) **A loss of strength** (vs. 10). Vs. 6 tells us that they were half way, and it’s possible that the exertion was taking a toll physically.
  - b) **A loss of vision** (note Judah’s comment in vs. 10 about all the “rubbish” lying around. Sometimes the disorder around us, especially during a building project, has a way of getting us down.
  - c) **A loss of confidence** (in vs. 10 the people say, “We ourselves are unable to rebuild the wall”) With loss of confidence, discouragement cannot be far behind!
  - d) **A loss of security** (vs. 11 notes that there was a threat of violence) and the loss of a sense of safety would inevitably lead to a loss of heart.
2. As this series has unfolded over the last few weeks, several people have commented that there’s a “too good to be true” quality about Nehemiah and the story he tells. Of course there is Nehemiah’s insistence on praying ALL THE TIME. We can admire it (I admire it!), but how many of us measure up to it. And then there is this chapter where Nehemiah does not allow discouragement to take hold. I once heard someone say, “A set back is set up for a come back,” a catchy expression that expresses optimism in the face of problems. How do you handle “set backs” in your life? Does Nehemiah’s experience seem “too good to be true”?
  3. I think Swindoll does a nice job of summarizing Nehemiah’s strategy, and these ideas might be of use to you:
    - a) **Unify your efforts toward a goal.** In vs. 13 Nehemiah reminds the people about their goal.
    - b) **Direct your attention to the Lord.** In vs. 14 Nehemiah directed the

attention of the people away from the rubble to God. How do we re-direct our attention? By calling to mind the promises God has made to us.

- c) **Maintain a balance between faith and action.** Isn't this something Nehemiah does time after time!
- d) **Determine a rallying point.** Vs. 19-20 tells us how Nehemiah gave a specific place for the people to run to. But a rallying point can also be a principle or an idea. We all need something to remember and claim and find our security in.
- e) **Develop a "serve one another" mentality.** Vs. 21-22 suggest a teamwork approach. They worked in shifts. Maybe one way out of discouragement is to look beyond our own problems and become involved in the lives of others.

Review Nehemiah's strategies and ask yourself whether or not you could apply them to your situation.

As a bonus, here is the Nehemiah reading from the paraphrase known as The Message: <sup>7-9</sup>When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repairs of the walls of Jerusalem were going so well—that the breaks in the wall were being fixed—they were absolutely furious. They put their heads together and decided to fight against Jerusalem and create as much trouble as they could. We countered with prayer to our God and set a round-the-clock guard against them.

<sup>10</sup>But soon word was going around in Judah,

The builders are pooped,  
the rubbish piles up;  
We're in over our heads,  
we can't build this wall.

<sup>11-12</sup>And all this time our enemies were saying, "They won't know what hit them. Before they know it we'll be at their throats, killing them right and left. I will put a stop to the work!" The Jews who were their neighbors kept reporting, "They have us surrounded; they're going to attack!" If we heard it once, we heard it ten times.

<sup>13-14</sup>So I stationed armed guards at the most vulnerable places of the wall and assigned people by families with their swords, lances, and bows. After looking things over I stood up and spoke to the nobles, officials, and everyone else: "Don't be afraid of them. Put your minds on the Master, great and awesome, and then fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

<sup>15-18</sup>Our enemies learned that we knew all about their plan and that God had frustrated it. And we went back to the wall and went to work. From then on half of my young men worked while the other half stood guard with lances, shields, bows, and

mail armor. Military officers served as backup for everyone in Judah who was at work rebuilding the wall. The common laborers held a tool in one hand and a spear in the other. Each of the builders had a sword strapped to his side as he worked. I kept the trumpeter at my side to sound the alert.

<sup>19-20</sup> Then I spoke to the nobles and officials and everyone else: "There's a lot of work going on and we are spread out all along the wall, separated from each other. When you hear the trumpet call, join us there; our God will fight for us."

<sup>21</sup> And so we kept working, from first light until the stars came out, half of us holding lances.

<sup>22</sup> I also instructed the people, "Each person and his helper is to stay inside Jerusalem—guards by night and workmen by day."

<sup>23</sup> We all slept in our clothes—I, my brothers, my workmen, and the guards backing me up. And each one kept his spear in his hand, even when getting water.