



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for August 14, 2022
“Lessons in Leadership: Dedicated to God”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Nehemiah 12:27-30

Our *Book of Worship* offers this prayer to be prayed at the dedication of a church building, *“Eternal God, let this building, which we dedicate to your name, be a house of salvation and grace where Christians gathered together may worship you in spirit and truth, may learn of you, and may grow together in love.”*

That prayer or something like I’m just sure was prayed when the original building was dedicated here at Saint John way back in 1981. I am also just as sure that it was prayed when we dedicated new educational space and the gym back in 1993. I am also confident that that prayer or something like it was prayed when the Sanctuary was dedicated some seventeen years ago.

A prayer like that was also prayed at the dedication of the wall around Jerusalem that had been re-built under the leadership of Nehemiah.

Any dedication like the ones just mentioned have at least three components. There is:

- A recognition of those who contributed.
- A celebration of God’s leadership
- And a dedication to God of both the structure and the purpose for which it was built.

All three were at play upon the dedication of the wall around Jerusalem. As we will see that dedication was a big deal.

Let’s read then about that dedication. We find that account in Nehemiah 12:27-30

Nehemiah 12:27-30

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. The musicians also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem—from the villages of the Netophathites, from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the musicians had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.

Getting Prepared

As I said just a second ago, the dedication of the newly rebuilt wall around Jerusalem was a big deal. It was an occasion for great celebration. It was also a chance for the people to get themselves right with God.

You remember that last week we read from Nehemiah 6 and 7. Those passages record the wall being completed. There is a lot that goes on between Nehemiah 6 and 7, and what we read today from Nehemiah 12. Those chapters in between span approximately two months.

To his credit, Nehemiah chose not to stage a dedication of the wall without the people taking some time to get right with God. During the time leading up to the dedication of the wall, the people under Nehemiah's leadership:

- Re-acquainted themselves with the law of Moses.
- Observed the Festival of Tabernacles commemorating God looking out for them during their forty years in the wilderness.
- Spent time confessing their waywardness, both past and present.
- Took time to remember the good things God had done.
- And, finally, struck a new covenant that among other things stated they would no longer neglect the house of God.

Knowing that the people did that, all with an interest of getting their hearts right with God, Nehemiah moved forward with the dedication. It is always good to be spiritually prepared before moving forward with the things we sense God calling us to do.

Starting Anew

The time of preparation eventually led to a time of purification. Not only did the priests purify themselves, but the people were purified as well. Their purification went a lot further than simply having their hands ceremonially cleansed. The people were called to purify their hearts as well. The call was not just for clean hands, but clean hearts.

What took place was not just some ceremony, but a chance for everyone to start anew. They were given the opportunity to re-dedicate themselves to the Lord. It used to be that "*re-dedication*" was a thing. It was a conscious decision to re-connect, an earnest desire to give oneself to Christ yet again.

Invitations were not only offered to accept Jesus for the first time, but for those who had strayed away to re-dedicate themselves anew. If you think about it, "*re-dedicating*" your life to Jesus is a daily thing. We effectively say to ourselves and to the Lord, "*It is my desire to be wholly dedicated to Christ each and every day.*"

We know it all too well. Life has a way of overwhelming us. There is so much that bombards our lives. It is all too easy to be drawn away. Resolving to stand with the Lord every day is a good practice, and think of it, you don't need a commitment card to do that.

What then does it mean to be wholly dedicated to the Lord? I have found that being wholly dedicated to God is both a need to and a want to thing.

Regarding needing the Lord:

- His strength sustains us.
- His love supports us.
- His help encourages us.
- His guidance leads us.

I don't know about you, but I need those things at play in my life. In a word, I need the Lord. That deep need actually bleeds into me wanting the Lord. It is my heart's desire to be well-connected to him.

Psalm 42:1-2 expresses it well for me, *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God."*

What does it mean to be dedicated to the Lord?

It means:

- Giving your whole self to his way and will for your life.
- Opening yourself to his love and letting that love shine through to those around you
- Accepting the forgiveness that is yours in Jesus and living in the same.
- Pleasing God in all you say and do.
- Looking out for the needs of others, even at the expense of your own.

What does it mean to be dedicated to the Lord? It means, as put so well in the Westminster Short Catechism, *"to glorify God and enjoy him forever."* This is our chief aim.

Celebrating Joyfully

All of this leads us to the dedication of the wall around Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah. As you might anticipate, it was a joyous occasion. They pulled out all the stops and so they should have. They took to heart what Nehemiah had said earlier in Nehemiah 8:10, *"The joy of the Lord is your strength."*

Nehemiah shared that upon hearing Ezra read the law before the people. Upon hearing the law, the people recognized the error of their ways and began to weep.

Nehemiah was quick to help them recognize just how sacred that moment was. God was with them, which in and of itself, was cause for great joy. Nehemiah called on the people to celebrate the presence of the Lord, which was exactly what they did.

And in that, *"joy"* became a certain *"strength."* Joy that wells up deep within has a way of strengthening life. It has a way of helping us face whatever it is, regardless of circumstance.

The question comes, though, *"What is it that robs you of your joy?"* Let's admit it, there are all sorts of circumstances, all sorts of people, all sorts of internal voices that conspire to rob us of our joy.

Amid all of that, look no further than your own relationship with God. If you are strong in the Lord, then joy will come. After all, God is the giver of all joy. Again, *"the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

Let's be crystal clear *"the joy of the Lord"* was more than evident at the dedication of the wall around Jerusalem. The people not only celebrated the completion of the wall but, more importantly, the fact that God was in their midst.

Because they had spent the previous two months seeking after the Lord, they had come to this moment with their hearts completely different. Where at one time they were a people content to go their own way, they were now alert to the things God was trying to do in their lives and they could do no other than celebrate.

I love the scene Nehemiah paints of the day the wall was finally dedicated.

- That day came after a good deal of hard work.
- It came after a good deal of soul-searching.
- It came after the people not only rallied around the leadership of Nehemiah, but around the leadership of God.

No wonder the people celebrated.

The scripture tells us that they worshipped with “*songs of thanksgiving.*” They pulled out their “*cymbals, harps, and lyres*” and went to town. They worshipped like they hadn’t in a long time. Men, women, and children were involved. Everybody participated. The scene was fitting for the climax of a Broadway musical.

The people stood on top of the wall. One group went to the left, the other to the right. Eventually, they encircled the entire city. They stood where they had once worked. That had to have had a great sense of accomplishment. In the end, they were able to ponder the great things God had done through them.

We do well to ponder the same. Don’t let the grind of life blind you to the great things God is doing in your life.

Standing there on that wall the people were able to look down on the city and get a sense of hope that it too would be re-built. In fact, that had already begun. People from all around were designated to come to Jerusalem to help populate it. The people were also able to look out and gaze far off into the distance, recognizing that God had brought them a long way.

There is nothing like getting above it all and seeing things as God sees them.

The dedication of the wall in Jerusalem was a day of great celebration, and God was at the center of it because everyone had come to the place of wholly dedicating themselves to God. That sort of thing makes all the difference.

And for the purposes of our present sermon series on leadership, it was Nehemiah’s dedication to God that not only provided the right example but led the way.

And Follow Me

Regarding being truly dedicated, hear the words of Jesus when he says, “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*”

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35)

This, after all, is the greatest lesson in leadership we can learn.

How about you? How to decide when it comes to such things? As I have said so often, there is no time like the present to decide.