

LOOKING FORWARD

Nehemiah 2:1-5

The movie, “Mr. Holland’s Opus” is about a music teacher who had big and better plans for his life than just teaching school. But he stayed for 30 years, giving up his bigger dreams.

During those 30 years he introduced new kinds of music, new ways of doing things, things that would appeal to his students, yet would still instill the love of music.

As it came time for him to retire, he felt that he had not accomplished much of anything that counted. He did not consider himself to be a success.

On his last day he packed his things, preparing to go quietly home. Unknown to him many of his former students gathered to honor him for the impact he had made in their lives.

A particularly touching tribute was paid by a young lady he had encouraged to continue even though she felt she had no ability.

Through the self-confidence he had helped to instill, she was now the governor of the state.

Mr. Holland was overwhelmed to find that his life had mattered and that so many people found him to be their inspiration. What he missed in not fulfilling his own personal goals enabled him to do something even more profound: serve others.

I don’t know what great plans and dreams you had for your life. Perhaps God’s will turned out to be a different road than you had planned or anticipated.

But listen—this side of heaven we may never know what we accomplish for God and His Kingdom when we are faithful.

You may never know fame or hear man’s applause, but when you are faithful to the will of our heavenly Father, the day will come when He will show you the results of your faithfulness.

I said last week that we should not dwell in the past. But we can learn from it.

Sixty-one years ago some had a dream of worshipping in a church here, of children learning about Jesus—first in the Belaire neighborhood, then here in the Del Norte area.

Like Mr. Holland, they did not realize the affects of what they started. Thank God that they acted on their vision. Now we continue their vision, and reach for the best God wants us to be.

Last week Paul challenged us to “Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called (us).” Today, from the OT Nehemiah speaks to us again.

1. Adapt your focus.

Neh. 2:3 (NIV) “Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

As we are faithful to God, we must continually adapt our focus to the present. Nehemiah was a slave, a cup bearer to King Artaxerxes. The Hebrews had been carried into exile many years before when Jerusalem and the homeland was destroyed.

Nehemiah had never been to Jerusalem, but he knew about it. His heart was there. He dreamed of worshipping in Jerusalem, the holy city.

But his dream was destroyed when his brother told him about the condition of the city. The reality was, the Holy City was broken. “The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire” (1:3), told his brother.

Nehemiah had to adjust. There was no way he could actually worship in the Holy City in its current condition. He had to change the focus of his dream.

Now his vision was to go and repair the walls—to restore the city so it would once again be a holy city, a place of worship, so that others could come there to meet God.

Del Norte Baptist was built by godly dreamers. This church was built with the sweat, tears and money of those who had a vision of a church here. Some of you have been here for many years..

This church is here because of their vision and service. They sacrificially gave their money, their time, and their abilities so that we could have a nice place to worship God; so that we could have places for Bible study; so that we could enjoy this conference center.

In a few weeks we will move back into the remodeled Worship center—something long overdue. Our vision has not changed—but maybe our focus needs to change.

We are not remodeling the WC just for our enjoyment—we want it to help inspire us to our primary purpose—ministry to our community and world..

Now is the time to adapt our dream to the present. It doesn't matter how young or old we are, none of us are finished. There is no retirement plan in God's work.

It doesn't matter if you think you have done your part. It doesn't matter if you think you don't have anything to offer anymore. I assure you, you do!

I know worship styles have changed and the music is different, and we don't do things like we used to. Praise the Lord that we don't. Everything in your life is different than it used to be.

Think about your car. We could go into the parking lot and not find even one 1955 Hudson? I'm pretty certain I would not find any of you cooking over a wood stove, or using an outdoor toilet?

This is growth, and growth always means change. We enjoy those changes—they've made our lives better. In the same way our church must continue to grow to meet the spiritual needs of new generations.

To bring the life-saving, life-changing Gospel, which doesn't change, to people of today in ways they can understand.

Florence Chadwick was the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions. She knew about the challenges of long-distance swimming.

On July 4, 1952 she was going to swim the channel from Catalina Island to the California coast. The water was very cold and the fog so thick she could barely see the boats in her party.

Sharks had to be driven away several time with rifle fire. She swam for 15 hours before finally asking to be taken out of the water. Her trainer said, "Stay in, you are very close to land." But when Florence looked all she could see was fog—so she quit, only one-half mile from land—just one-half mile from her goal.

Listen to what she later said, “I’m not excusing myself, but if I could have seen the land, I might have made it.” It wasn’t the cold, fear, or exhaustion that caused Florence Chadwick to fail—it was the fog. The fog destroyed her dream of swimming that channel.

Don’t lose sight of why our church is here and why you are in it. Don’t quit, don’t give up.

2. Avoid the negative.

Neh. 2:2 (NIV) so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid,

The king asked Nehemiah why he was sad. Nehemiah had good reason to be frightened. It was against the law, with the penalty of death, for a slave to show negative emotions in front of the king.

Nehemiah could have backed off right then. He could have decided that his dream wasn’t worth testing the king’s anger. His dream of going to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls would have been dead.

Sometimes we feel like David when he wrote, “They sharpen their tongues like swords, and aim their words like deadly arrows. They shoot from ambush . . .” (Ps. 64:3-4).

Watch out for these negatives:

(1) Fear.

Sometime we look at the future and we’re just afraid. Luaine and I like the opportunities city living gives to us.

But oh my, people barricade themselves inside their houses, lock themselves in their cars, arm their car alarms, and are afraid to wave at you on the street.

On the news and in the papers we hear and read about violence, gang activity, car jacking, and so on. But these aren’t the only kinds of things that cause us to be afraid.

Valueless education in schools, job security, the dream of owning your own home, financing a college education. We older folks turn on our TV sets and see beautiful young bodies with unlined faces and thick wavy hair.

When older people are mentioned on TV it’s usually about dental adhesives or Depends. How can I live on a fixed income? My health is deteriorating. My family is far away. All this fog of fear can keep us from our goal.

Don't let fear take away your focus. The only hope for our world is Jesus Christ. Our job as a church is to help people connect with Christ. We must be careful that fear of the new and fear of change do not stop us from doing big things for Jesus.

(2) Tiredness:

Sometimes we feel so tired that we lose our purpose and meaning in the fog. We're close but don't know it.

You may need to take a break and get your batteries recharged. But you must not quit. We as a church must continue..

Catch the vision of people coming to Jesus, of your church family growing both in numbers and learning godly things. Can you see the day the nursery is overflowing? Can you see the expectant faces of children learning that Jesus loves them?

(3) Negative people

Don't you hate to be around someone who is always negative. Did you know they can destroy a dream, they can ruin a vision.

3. Trust God.

Neh. 2:4 (NIV) "Then I prayed to the God of heaven,"

Nehemiah prayed to God. The king demanded to know what Nehemiah wanted. So what did Nehemiah do? He prayed to God.

It's easy for our dreams to get lost in the fog, and it's easy for us to lose sight of the good we are doing.

But God had work to be done, and Nehemiah's dream was God's dream. The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem would inform the world that God was still with His chosen people.

4. Move on.

Neh. 2:5 (NIV) "...send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it." (v.5).

Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet were taking a walk one evening. Finally Piglet broke the silence and asks, "When you wake up in the morning, Pooh, what's the first thing you say to yourself?"

“What’s for breakfast?” answers Pooh. “And what do you say, Piglet?” “I say, I wonder what exciting thing is going to happen today?”

Small dreams yield small results. Unhealthy dreams produce sick congregations. What are we choosing, breakfast dreams or excitement dreams?

If you are comfortable and satisfied with the status quo, you have chosen a breakfast dream. If you are one of those negative people who find fault with everything happening in church, you’re living a breakfast dream.

If you are one of those who do not understand the significance and victory of those 16 new Christians last year who were baptized, then you need to fall on your knees and ask God to rekindle your dream.

What God is doing and going to do in our church is far more important than any of our selfish desires. God wants you to trust Him and to join Him in His work. What exciting things are going to happen today, tomorrow and the future because of our faithfulness?

Application:

Let’s not be guilty of pouring our energies and passions into minor issues that do not have eternal value. Let’s look forward to the possibilities for our church. Remember, our one purpose for being here is Jesus Christ.