

The situation was discouraging, not only did the work seem overwhelming—more than they had expected, but now there were rumors of pending attacks by the enemy. The report comes to Nehemiah: ***“The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.’ And our enemies said, ‘Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and we will kill them and put an end to the work’” (4:10-11).*** Can you hear the groaning, the questions: Is what we are doing worth it? Are our labors in vain? What are we to do amidst all this rubble and these threats? These days are days of desperation.

Nehemiah is ever the cheerleader. He has heard the reports, he has seen the rubble and yet his words are: ***“Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes” (4:14).*** Remember the Lord! Our God is an awesome God. Even before the hymn writer acknowledged that “Our God is an Awesome God” Nehemiah knows. Our God moves before and beyond history. Our God is greater than all the other gods. Our God is an awesome God.

How many of you saw the “moonset” on Tuesday morning? It was the night or morn of the harvest moon. It was large in the west; the sky was clear and as I left around 6:45 a.m. it was setting on the western horizon. There was a lone pine tree just to its left outlined in the predawn light and a wisp of cloud floating over the top of the moon. It was a Psalmist moment, an awe moment – our God is an awesome God.

Nehemiah reminds the people, those involved in the hard work of rebuilding the wall and fortifying the city, of who God is and what they are laboring for. It is not for themselves but for their sons, daughters, wives and nation—their future. God is in the process, God has been in the process and God will be in the process—Remember the Lord!

They return to work with some slight modifications. Half the workers are now standing guard with spears, swords, shields and armor—they are ready should the enemy attack. The rest are working, some with spears in one hand and balancing the load in the other. Others have their swords strapped to their waist – ready should the signal come. You try working under these conditions. It is not easy. The alarm system is in place—should one section need help the others will respond. They will know by the alarm what area is in distress. Nothing will stop the rebuilding of the wall—Remember the Lord!

Luke is recording the final week in the life of Jesus. Jesus is preparing his followers for the coming days, for what life will be like without him. His followers are seeing things differently. They are still expecting a new King and Kingdom. They see the Triumphal entry as an indication of what is to come.

They have a vision of the past that they want to see restored. Their swords are ready. All Jesus needs to do is give the signal and they will be at his side for the coming battle, the restoration of the Kingdom. However, this was not the direction in which Jesus was heading.

Yes, he tells them to be prepared, to get ready but not for battle. His words tell them and us not to get bogged down with worldly things. To pray and be ready for the times that are coming. He wants them prepared – to keep their eyes on the larger goal of God.

At our region meeting last Friday, Pat Hunter, our M & M representative, spoke to the clergy. She had some words of wisdom for our present day and the market fluctuations. Her first recommendation: “Don’t watch CNBC.” Now she is not against CNBC but she pointed out that Bear markets usually last 36/40 months and Bull markets 70/80 months. In other words, she said that we should not focus on the immediate market crisis but keep our eyes down the road. Caught in the now we often lose sight of the larger picture. George Marshall said it this way: *“We must stop setting our sights by the light of each passing ship; instead we must set our course by the stars.”*

Jesus’ words are that we are to pray. We are to keep in touch with God and keep the larger picture before us. We are to keep our eyes on where we are heading and not let the crisis of the present weigh us down. Phil Yancey, in his book on prayer, tells of climbing one of the 14,000’ peaks in Colorado. At one point he stops and looks back and sees some specks moving along the path. He wonders if these are animals or other hikers. Then he realizes that a few hours earlier that was him – he sees where he has come from and then turns to where he is heading, the summit. Jesus would not be diverted from the cross – the direction he was heading – he kept before him the larger picture – our redemption. In other words: Remember the Lord!

What is the Rx for meeting life’s challenges? I see two or three (depending on how you separate them). The first is that we “remember the Lord and pray.” Now, for me, praying is remembering the Lord, and so I don’t separate them. We need to be reminded where we have come from (reread the historical Psalms 105 and 106—it was important that Israel be reminded of their journey) and see how God has guided us through the past. God has sustained and supported and given us the strength for the days in which we live. We are more today than we were yesterday. Remember the Lord, pray and then get back to the work. As we stop and pray we remember the Lord and give thanks for what God has done.

The second Rx is that we are not alone. Nehemiah reminds them that he has stationed troops around the city so even though they may not see them they are there and ready to respond as soon as the alarm is sounded. Even though they may not see them they are there. We are not asked to do this

alone. Is not one of the reasons why we gather for worship each week to remind us that we are not alone? Look around; we are more than we imagined. Last week some of us attended the region convention of the Evergreen Association and we were reminded that we are not alone. Jesus' promise is that he would not leave us alone but would send one, the Holy Spirit, to continue walking with us. We are not alone – there are others ready to come the moment we call. Remember Elijah. He is running from Jezebel and his enemies. Alone on the mountaintop he complains that he is the only one remaining who is faithful to God. Now even his life is in danger. God gently reminds Elijah that he is not seeing the wider picture, there are at least 7,000 who have remained on God's side (I Kings 19:14ff). We must keep our eyes focused on the larger picture—Remember the Lord.

We are reminded of this almost every week when the prayer chain is activated. We are asked to pray, to address a specific need and suddenly there are others praying for and with us. It is an immediate recognition that we are not alone (if you are not a part of the prayer chain and want to be just let us know). We are connected. We feel a sense of support and acknowledge that we are not alone.

As I was working on this message today two images came to my mind. The first comes from our years in the Philippines—We stood on the spot where General MacArthur returned to the Philippines after WWII. He has promised to return and he fulfilled his promise—there on the beach is a memorial to him with the words of fulfillment of his promise and the date he kept his promise. Even though General MacArthur and the Allied forces had been withdrawn for a while, they were not alone, they kept before them the promise he made. Do we not keep before us the promise Christ made – we remember the Lord!

The other has to do with our American Baptist Men (yes there is an ABM group—it may not be as well known as the women's group but they do exist). They have at least two semi-trucks that are prepared to respond to emergencies. The trucks are filled with chain saws, ropes, etc. Items needed to clear away the rubble after hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, etc. These trucks sit ready to respond as soon as there is a need, with volunteers willing to staff them – they have represented us and Christ after of some of the major disasters in this country in recent years. They remind us and the communities they have been called to work along side, restore and rebuild when called upon – we do not stand alone.

Remember the Lord! And get back to work.