

Not Lacking In Anything

I Corinthians 1:1-9; Nehemiah 1

During the recent snow and my bout with bronchitis and sinusitis, I did little other than sleep, cough, and read. One article I read included information about the prime meridian at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, England. The author told of her family's visit to this human demarcation of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, marked by a simple line cut into the pavement. However, the relationship of the simple line to the corresponding stars in the heavens, allows us to find our place on the map and in the world. Through the work of astronomer John Flamsteed, scientists have been able to help people find their position on the planet earth. The prime meridian is defined as the fixed position by which our knowledge of time and place can be understood.

The Bible is like that for us. Scripture is our prime meridian. It is the fixed position, given by God, through which we can understand who we are, where we are, and where we must go from here.

Also a part of my reading was the Book of Nehemiah. I must share with you that I almost always preach from the Lectionary passages. However, as I read Nehemiah, I realized just how little of this Book are included in the Lectionary preaching schedule and, how much this scripture has to offer as we seek to understand who we are, where we are, and where we must go from here. Today we will look at the first chapter. Later, we will spend time in the other chapters, seeking how God speaks to us through this faithful servant.

In this First Chapter we meet Nehemiah, the Cupbearer for the king, in the court of the King, inquiring about the condition of the Jews and Jerusalem and how they had fared after the exile. As he was informed of their desperate condition, the city walls in rubble, the gates of the city burned, and the Jewish citizens living in the aftermath of the war, unprotected and vulnerable, Nehemiah committed himself to fasting and prayer as he sought God's direction for how he, Nehemiah, could help alleviate the desperate situation in Jerusalem.

He began to pray:

5-6 I said, "God, God-of-Heaven, the great and awesome God, loyal to his covenant and faithful to those who love him and obey his commands: Look at me, listen to me. Pay attention to this prayer of your servant that I'm praying day and night in intercession for your servants, the People of Israel, confessing the sins of the People of Israel. And, I'm including myself; me and my ancestors, among those who have sinned against you.

7-9 "We've treated you like dirt: We haven't done what you told us, haven't followed your commands, and haven't respected the decisions you gave to Moses your servant. All the same, remember the warning you posted to your servant Moses: 'If you betray me, I'll scatter you to the four winds, but if you come back to me and do what I tell you, I'll gather up all these scattered peoples from wherever they ended up and put them back in the place I chose to mark with my Name.'

10-11 “Well, there they are—your servants, your people whom you so powerfully and impressively redeemed. O Master, listen to me, listen to your servant’s prayer—and yes, to all your servants who delight in honoring you—and make me successful today so that I get what I want from the king.”

Nehemiah admits his own sinful nature, admits he and his family have fallen short in the eyes of the Lord, but then asks for God to use him and to help him as he lends aid to those who are in need.

Nehemiah does not know exactly what he will do, but he does know that he will need God and the King to accomplish anything. No doubt, Nehemiah would need help, but he knew that God would give to him everything he needed to accomplish what needed to be done.

In Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians we read, "in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind - so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I have had many come to me in the churches I have served, expressing that they cannot....I don't know....I don't have...I'm not able...

But in the scripture passages for this day, we see two examples of God providing what is needed to accomplish what God wants to accomplish. I continue until to remind myself and remind others...It Is Not About Us! It is about what God can and will and is doing through us...through you and me. I cannot accomplish anything without God, but with God all things are possible.

Nehemiah shows us that first we must be willing to be used. Second we must commit ourselves to God. Third, we pray for God's guidance, submitting ourselves - humbly giving ourselves to God.

As I mentioned in the announcements, last year the Session adopted what I call "a faith budget." Others might call it foolish. However, we adopted a budget that spent \$30,000 more than was pledged. We had no idea where the additional funds would come from, nor how we would meet some of the expenses for programs and salaries. However, we had faith that if God wanted these things to come to pass at FPC, then God would provide and would make a way. And guess what?

We continue to pray for guidance and direction for FPC as we move forward. What will the future look like, some ask? Others question if there is a future. Nehemiah demonstrates that as faithful servants of a loving God, we MUST move forward, there is always a future, God is continually showing us the way...God's way. AND...God is always providing everything we need to accomplish what may seem impossible to our human minds. We cannot get comfortable with the way things are, because with God, there is always more to be done.

In 1577 explorer and naval pioneer, Sir Francis Drake wrote this prayer: "Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen I love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hope and to push us into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love."

I invite you to begin this year by committing yourselves to doing what God directs and to be in constant prayer for our church, for the direction we are to go, and how you can be God's instrument in making a difference in this place.