



LESSONS

ISAIAH 53:4-12

PSALM 91:9-16

HEBREWS 5:1-10

ST. MARK 10:35-45

SEMICONTINUOUS SERIES

JOB 38:1-7 [34-41]

PSALM 104:1-9, 24, 35B
(24)

BIBLE IN 90 DAYS READING

NEHEMIAH 1:4-11A

PRAYER OF THE DAY

SOVEREIGN GOD, YOU
TURN YOUR GREATNESS
INTO GOODNESS FOR ALL
THE PEOPLES ON EARTH.
SHAPE US INTO WILLING
SERVANTS OF YOUR
KINGDOM, AND MAKE US
DESIRE ALWAYS AND
ONLY YOUR WILL,
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST,
OUR SAVIOR AND LORD.
AMEN.

9300 E. BELLEVIEW AVE.
GREENWOOD VILLAGE,
COLORADO 80111

VOICE
(303) 770-9300

FAX
(303) 770-9301

WEB
WWW.STPLC.ORG

Liturgical Day: The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Date: October 18, 2009

Sermon Title: The Heart of Restoration

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning, in our first lesson, we turn to the prophet Nehemiah – a reading that was assigned to our “Bible in 90 Days” readers just yesterday. This is a book that doesn’t get a lot of attention these days. In 25 years of ministry, I’ve never preached a sermon or taught a Bible study that was based on a text from Nehemiah. So I’ve enjoyed getting to know this book a bit better during the past week.

In our English language Bibles, Ezra and Nehemiah are two separate books, and they follow immediately after 1st and 2nd Chronicles. But in the oldest copies of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bibles that existed in Jesus’ day, Ezra and Nehemiah were combined as one book. As a matter of fact, in most Hebrew Bibles that was the case until the middle of the 15th Century. It has also been long believed that Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah all had the same author. That theory isn’t quite as widely embraced today as it once was, but it seems that at least Ezra and Nehemiah came from the same pen.

These books are set in the 5th Century before Christ. Ezra may have come to Jerusalem in about 458 BC, and Nehemiah’s first stint as governor in Jerusalem may have begun about 445 BC. They were both reformers, and they attempted to turn God’s people back to a true form of worship and faithfulness.

In the opening verses of this book, Nehemiah offers what we might call his “first inaugural address” – words that express his understanding of the situation his country is in, and what his role will be as a leader in Israel. They are powerful words.

*O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God
who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him
and keep his commandments!
let your ear be attentive and your eyes open
to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night
for your servants, the people of Israel,
confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you.
Both I and my family have sinned.
We have offended you deeply,
failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances
that you commanded your servant Moses.*

Nehemiah begins by affirming that God keeps “covenant and steadfast love” with us. There is a constancy to God’s love for us. It is embodied in the covenant God makes with us – the agreement about what it will mean to live together as a loving God and a faithful people. Nehemiah describes God’s love as being steadfast: it is strong and lasting and reliable. This is the kind of love that a person can depend on over the long-haul. Nehemiah might well have begun his remarks by saying that believers are “welcomed into God’s love, just as we are.”

Nehemiah then branches into a plea for God to hear his unending prayer. He trusts in God’s ability to hear him. He knows that his words are not in vain. And he prays day and night – determined to lift the people of Israel up before God, and to entrust them to God’s loving care. Nehemiah was a believer in prayer, and he believed that God, who hears his prayers, is able to make a difference.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God’s work. Our hands.

Finally, having established his belief in God's love, and having professed his confidence in God's listening ear, Nehemiah gets down to business. He makes a strong and heartfelt confession. He says, "I confess our sins... We have sinned against you... I and my family have sinned.. We have offended you deeply." No claim here that he didn't inhale. No weak attempt to excuse himself from his misdeeds. As a matter of fact, he personally owns the sins of those whose behavior sent Israel into exile – many of whom died years before Nehemiah himself was born. Nehemiah grounds his inaugural address in a confessional character, owning up to his own brokenness – trusting that by acknowledging Israel's sin, he and Israel will obtain the forgiveness and new life that only God can give.

Think about what lies at the heart of this address. An appreciation for the awesome power of God's love. A determination to view one's self with a sincere sense of humility. The kind of true repentance that leads to forgiveness, renewal, and new life. These are strong themes in Nehemiah's opening address to the people of Israel. And they will become strong themes in his tenure as a leader in Jerusalem. These themes, lived out and articulated by Nehemiah some 450 years before Jesus was born, are themes that can still have a tremendous influence on how you and I experience life and faith today.

As a matter of fact, it seems that these themes can shed light on nearly any aspect of what it means to be a faithful person today. For example, this morning we will hear the second in a series of presentations from our Stewardship Team. These messages are intended to help us reflect on what we'll give to make this congregation strong in 2010. Think about what it would be like if every one of us responded to these presentations in the spirit of Nehemiah.

The first thing we would do is take stock of God's awesome presence in our lives. That is actually where all faithful stewardship begins. We've raised money in the past for special causes. We've raised funds for Selian hospital, for our youth servant events, for Lutheran family services for, for Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp, for Saint Peter building projects... In those cases we have described a ministry or an opportunity to you – usually something at some distance from us – and we've asked you to chip in and make a difference. But that is fund raising, not stewardship. Stewardship always begins at the same place: in the belief that God's awesome presence in our lives has made such a difference for us, that we find ourselves eager for a concrete way to thank God.

Then, if Nehemiah was guiding us, we would respond with humility. We would acknowledge that we have not done as much as God has asked of us. We would realize that we were capable of so much more. We would observe the example of more generous believers in our midst and yearn for that same experience of generosity. Then Nehemiah would invite us into repentance: not just saying that we are sorry, but turning our lives around, and beginning to go in the direction God is calling us to go. Not just wishing that we had been more generous with the church, but actually beginning to do so. We would do so by trusting in God's ability to make it happen among us – and this trust is what leads to the kinds of new, stronger beginnings that God can make in our lives. Nehemiah would be a good stewardship leader – too bad we can't invite him to come and serve as guest preacher on Stewardship Sunday this year.

Today is also New Member Sunday. This morning, we welcome six new families into our congregation. We are pleased to have them among us, and look forward to the ways we'll grow together in years to come. As I think of them today, I can't help but wonder how these themes from Nehemiah will play out in their lives, and in the ways they connect with Saint Peter.

I know that our New Members have experienced God's awesome presence in their lives. We've been getting to know one another over the past four weeks, and it has been a privilege to hear stories about what their faith, their God and their church has meant to them in the past. As I mentioned in one of our earlier sessions, there is really no personal advantage to becoming a member of this congregation. Anyone, member or guest alike, is welcome to participate fully in any aspect of our life together. But membership is for those who want to give more. Membership is for those whose lives have been touched by God, and who want to respond to that touch by becoming active supporters of a congregation. I think we'll see that happen with a number of these new members, and I am excited to see what giftedness and enthusiasm and faithfulness they will bring to our community.

Nehemiah would remind us all that we come to that involvement with humility, realizing that there is so much more than we could have been doing to stay faithful to Christ. Realizing that there is so much more we all have to learn. It is that humility that allows us to make a genuine confession of our sins. To offer ourselves to God in repentance – owning up to our shortcomings, and seeking to turn our lives in God’s direction.

It is then that we begin to experience the new, stronger beginnings that are only possible with God. And I hope that today will be a new, strong beginning here at Saint Peter. A new, strong beginning for those who are officially joining us as members. And a new, strong beginning for this congregation.

So whether we are talking about stewardship or membership or any other aspect of faithfulness, these themes of Nehemiah – being aware of God’s awesome presence, responding in humility, making a confession of our sin, and experiencing new life – these themes are helpful guides as we ask ourselves what it means to live faithfully. The world could use a few more people like Nehemiah. He was a wise and faithful leader for the people of Israel. And the character of his life was a strong and compelling example for them. May we too learn from his example. And may the themes of faith that we see in his inaugural address shape our life together as well.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (October 18, 2009)

Gospel Lesson; English Text: ⁱ

^{10:35} James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” ³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” ³⁹ They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

⁴¹ When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” ⁱⁱ

Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

^{10:35} Καὶ προσπορεύονται αὐτῷ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωάννης οἱ υἱοὶ Ζεβεδαίου λέγοντες αὐτῷ· διδάσκαλε, θέλομεν να ἔαν αἰτήσωμεν σε ποιήσης ἡμῖν. ³⁶ ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· τι θέλετε [με] ποιήσω ὑμῖν; ³⁷ οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· δὸς ἡμῖν να εἷς σου ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ εἷς ἐξ ἀριστερῶν καθίσωμεν ἐν τῇ δόξῃ σου. ³⁸ ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· οὐκ οοδατε τι αἰτέισθε. δύνασθε πιεῖν τὸ ποτήριον ἐγὼ πίνω τὸ βάπτισμα ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθῆναι; ³⁹ οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· δυνάμεθα. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· τὸ ποτήριον ἐγὼ πίνω πιεσθε καὶ τὸ βάπτισμα ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθήσεσθε, ⁴⁰ τὸ δὲ καθίσει ἐκ δεξιῶν μου ἐξ εὐωνύμων οὐκ σπιν ἐμόν δοῦναι, ἀλλ’ οἷς ἡτοίμασται. ⁴¹ Καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ δέκα ρξαντο ἀγανακτεῖν περὶ Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωάννου. ⁴² καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος αὐτοὺς ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγει αὐτοῖς· οοδατε τι οἱ δοκοῦντες ρχειν τῶν ἐθνῶν κατακυριεύουσιν αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι αὐτῶν κατεξουσιάζουσιν αὐτῶν. ⁴³ οὐχ οοτως δὲ ἐστὶν ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀλλ’ ὅς ν θέλη μέγας γενέσθαι ἐν ὑμῖν σται ὑμῶν διάκονος, ⁴⁴ καὶ ὅς ν θέλη ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι πρῶτος ἐστὶ πάντων δούλος. ⁴⁵ καὶ γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ

ⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

ⁱⁱ St. Mark 10:35-45, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

| διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν. ⁱⁱⁱ

“The Bible in 90 Days” Lesson:

^{1:4} When I heard these words [about those who returned from exile, and found Jerusalem destroyed] I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵ I said, “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; ⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. ⁷ We have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses. ⁸ Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; ⁹ but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.’ ¹⁰ They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. ¹¹ O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name.” ^{iv}

Scheduled Readings for “The Bible in 90 Days” 9/13/2009 - 12/12/2009

Date	Begin Reading At	Sermon Based On
9/13	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 1:1-19
9/20	Leviticus 1:1	Exodus 16:2-15
9/27	Deuteronomy 23:12	Deuteronomy 6:1-9
10/4	1 Samuel 28:20	Joshua 24:1-3, 14-18
10/11	1 Chronicles 1:1	1 Kings 3:5-12
10/18	Nehemiah 13:15	Nehemiah 1:4-11a
10/25	Psalms 89:14	Job 38:1-11
11/1	Isaiah 14:1	Psalms 104:24-34, 35b
11/8	Jeremiah 33:23	Isaiah 25:6-9
11/15	Daniel 9:1	Ezekiel 2:1-5
11/22	Matthew 26:57	Micah 6:1-8
11/29	Acts 6:8	John 20:19-31
12/6	Hebrews 1:1	Romans 5:1-11

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Mark 10:35-45, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

^{iv} Nehemiah 1:4-11a, New Revised Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).