

September 6, 2020 – 14th Sunday After Pentecost

A Blessed Sunday morning to you, and welcome to our twenty-seventh online worship service, on this Labour Day Weekend ☺

This week, in my personal devotions, the readings that came up were from the Old Testament, the book of Nehemiah. This was an interesting coincidence, since I began the week weary from the various tasks of re-opening church, and had begun my morning with prayer, asking God to show me a way forward. So, although the lectionary reading for this Sunday is from Matthew 18, I take the liberty today of using scripture from Nehemiah for the focus teaching.

It was good that God provided the encouragement of Nehemiah early in the week, because between Monday night and Tuesday morning, I got news of two deaths in our beloved church community. Otto Kiefer and Artur Pinnau have passed away, and we will miss them dearly from our earthly communion. Artur's family extend their thanks to everyone who has reached out, and encourage you to be in touch after the Labour Day long weekend, to share your memories and condolences. Karl also sends a big thank you to those who have expressed your love on Uncle Otto's passing. Please do keep both families in your prayers as they go through this time of loss. Due to the limitations on gathering numbers at this time, we may not be able to honour them by attendance at their funeral services, but any condolence communications sent to church will be forwarded to the families.

Nothing beats seeing each other in person. We have started, weather permitting, meeting on the church lawn on Sundays, 10 am to 11 am for an informal visiting time. You are encouraged to bring your lawn chair and complete all toileting before coming out. We visit at a safe distance, without the requirement of masks (as we will be outdoors). The goal of this time is to gently re-open the experience of in-person time, in preparation for re-entry to the building. Latest information on progress with church re-opening tasks is shared here, as questions arise. This Sunday, as I will be officiating at Artur Pinnau's funeral service at 11 am, I will not be available for the whole hour, but Hazel & Nyle Schmidt and David Berg have committed to being present (weather permitting) to continue the conversation after I have left to officiate Artur's funeral ... This is called "being church"!

I have more to say about church re-opening – but it is in the sermon (as it has come to my attention that some of you are not reading these preamble notes!) – so please follow-up with action items from the sermon ☺

In the meantime, remember the COVID-19 virus remains alive and well. For us to likewise remain alive and well, precautions are advised: safe distancing, avid handwashing and polite consideration of and respect for the fears of others are, at this time, acts of love. As followers of Jesus, we are called to love each other, so please exercise these acts of love generously ☺

If you still have not heard from me since my return from leave, and you had reached out, please kick my shins with a phone call. It is not my intention to neglect visitation ministry in the administration heavy time of re-opening and outdoor, safe distanced visits, or a phone visit from me can be arranged. Please do reach out by email or phone: pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org or 519-653-4721

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

I want to offer a word of thanks for those of you who have allowed us to use your photos, or who have offered the use of your photos in the creation of our music videos. It truly adds to our worshipping community and makes worship more of a 'group effort'. It's not too late to get in on the fun! If you have some photos you might like to send along, please be in touch with me by email, lorre.calder@sympatico.ca. We can arrange how best to co-ordinate access to your photos. Full credit will of course be given.

—Lorre Calder

**Please take a few moments of silence, prepare your heart,
centre yourself for worship.**

Prelude: Land acknowledgement with Brad's creative composition ☺

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Zar8-GeUs>

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, in your home and in mine.

Prayer of the Day: Holy God, you have given us stewardship of a physical church, and you have made us, as people, your holy temple. We want to gather together to worship you, not only in Spirit, but safely, together. We need your help to re-open our church building, at the time and pace that your will affords. Please show us the way to do this, according to your will. Please show us how to do this in the example of Jesus: loving each other as Jesus first loved us. Amen.

The Lesson: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

And now, friends, we ask you to honor those leaders who work so hard for you, who have been given the responsibility of urging and guiding you along in your obedience. Overwhelm them with appreciation and love!

Get along among yourselves, each of you doing your part. Our counsel is that you warn the freeloaders to get a move on. Gently encourage the stragglers, and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet. Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other's nerves you don't snap at each other. Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out.

Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.

Don't suppress the Spirit, and don't stifle those who have a word from the Master. On the other hand, don't be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what's good. Throw out anything tainted with evil.

May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together—spirit, soul, and body—and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it! (The Message Translation)

Word of God, word of life. ***C: Thanks be to God.*** *

Reading Homework: Nehemiah chapters 1-3

Acclamation of the Word: Hymn #793 Be Thou My Vision

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2DkJKyKYN4>

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The Holy Scriptures according to Nehemiah 1:1-4, 9-11a***C: Glory to you O Lord.***

The memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah.

It was the month of Kislev in the twentieth year. At the time I was in the palace complex at Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, had just arrived from Judah with some fellow Jews. I asked them about the conditions among the Jews there who had survived the exile, and about Jerusalem.

They told me, "The exile survivors who are left there in the province are in bad shape. Conditions are appalling. The wall of Jerusalem is still rubble; the city gates are still cinders." When I heard this, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God-of-Heaven.

"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.'

"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". [The Message Translation]

The Word of our Lord. ***C: Thanks be to God.****

Sermon (by Pastor Janaki) – "On Feeling Nehemiah-ish":

Click here: <https://youtu.be/QmBCLTj99fs> to access the audio of the sermon, or imagine Pastor Janaki's voice here:

A number of newsletters ago, I wrote an article about what happens when Atlas shrugs. You see, Atlas was the mythical Titan, condemned to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders, or to hold aloft the heavens. It was a heavy, heavy burden, and certainly not a burden ever meant to be carried by any single individual. In the article I wrote about Atlas shrugging, I explored the question of what happens when most of the responsibility of stewardship of our church is left to just a very few, what happens when they have to shrug. That was before COVID was part of our earthly reality.

COVID has created a shrug for us, and our church world is not being held together terribly well right now ... and I thought I might illustrate the challenges a little bit with the story of my first car, a beloved Suzuki Samurai. It was a hardy little jeep-like vehicle, except nothing in it was powered. Legend had it that, if one was due to deliver a baby and the birth pangs were taking long to come, a drive in the Samurai would jostle one enough to bring the labour on. My beloved blue Samurai took me to mountains and gully bottoms that no normal vehicle should have ever traversed. It was old, dinged up in places, and had many a story to tell.

Much like our church building.

I owned that lovely Samurai from 1999, when I returned to Jamaica from Engineering School at Waterloo, until 2014, when I had been in Canada for many years, and it became clear I

would not move back to Jamaica. My mom and my sister became the Atlas' who held up the Samurai while I was away. They did not drive it (because we stopped insuring it for road use). And all those old, dinged up parts that had kept working so well while I was driving it all over the country of Jamaica – all those parts got tired and worn out, began to crack and break from dis-use ...

Much like our church building during the past few years, and even more so during COVID.

Then, the time to ask the question came along: will you ever move back to Jamaica to drive this car? Shouldn't we sell it so someone else can make use of it? We can't take care of it any more ... so Atlas shrugged and my beloved Samurai was sold.

The few Atlas' who are holding up our church are struggling with the tasks of re-opening. There is much to be done in even just preparing the protocols, calling up people to see if they will be involved, sharing documents and updates, figuring our cleaning protocols and entry and exits. Our Atlas' are tired. Our leaders are tired. Myself, I am finding the task so, so wearying. And yes, I have sat down and wept many a time.

This is our church; it is not the sole responsibility of church council, or pastor, or Hazel or Nyle, or Bonnie or Alex, or Luis or Donna ... and this is why the story of Nehemiah was so timely when I came to it in my devotions this week.

You see this guy, Nehemiah, was the cupbearer to the King. My understanding is it was his job to bring the cup of wine, and also to pre-taste in case it had been infiltrated with poison meant for the King. This King had the power to release Nehemiah to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem: the city of God which had met destruction when taken captive by Babylon.

If you could imagine your pew wrecked to bits, with raccoons running amok all over it ... that was Jerusalem. If you could imagine our stained glass windows broken, our walls falling down, our communion table broken in two ... that was Jerusalem.

If you can imagine your Pastor, your Bonnie Scott, your Alex Black, your Hazel & Nyle, your Donna and Luis, your Lorre and other leaders with full time jobs struggling to start school again at COVID time, struggling to do the duties of their day jobs and also re-open a church ... that was Jerusalem.

But we gather together and put our heads together, and we have lists of tasks that need doing, lists of Sunday jobs for which people need to be trained, lists of calls to be made, and follow ups to be done ... and in the middle of this, I also have the job of pastoral care, and this week funerals and care for those who are missing their Uncle Otto and their beloved Artur, care for those going through other transitions in their lives that are difficult and painful ... and this week I had to shrug some re opening tasks for bereavement ministry instead.

This week I had to tell many leaders: please make sure you take care of yourself first, put your own oxygen mask on first and be gentle with yourself. Leave the church stuff because others have to help ... others have to help ... heIIllooooo??? Is there an echo in this place???

As I read on in the story of Nehemiah (and by now I know all of you are sitting on the edge of your seat going ... what happens next), not only does the King release this cup bearer to go and do the rebuilding ... but guess what?

People and people and people and people with all kinds of hard to pronounce names like Malkijah and Hashabiah and Zadok & Shelemiah ... guess what they did? They came out to help with their tools and their skills and their love of God and their love of each other (like

what the letter to the Thessalonians speaks about, by the way and just sayin') ... they came out to help.

Because, "love each other" is not just a warm fuzzy feeling, and being a person of faith is not just about arriving when all the work is done.

If you cannot wield a hammer or climb a ladder, maybe you can dial a phone, and talk to someone, maybe you can wash glasses and deliver them to those who need them for a funeral reception in these unprecedented times! Maybe you can walk a Pastor's beagle ☺ who tires of sitting in Pastor's office wondering when, oh when will he ever get to sniff the great outdoors again ☺

If you do not have internet access, or don't know what a zoom meeting is, maybe you can reach out and ask, Pastor or Bonnie Scott, who can I call today and take a telephone visit with? Who can I call to ask if they can help? Who can I befriend in this time so that we continue being church while we wait for re-opening, keep the life blood of gospel flowing?

If you cannot review protocols, or make sense of insurance liability issues, if you cannot fix or replace locks, maybe you can help with communications by calling some people to explain the reopening process, so they know what to expect. Maybe you can PRAY ☺ HARD ☺ or help with some tidying or cleaning.

COVID has scattered us, like the servants Nehemiah prays for; our building needs work like my old unused Samurai – it needs to be put to good use ... and we are God's servants, whom God has powerfully and impressively redeemed through Jesus' own life. Listen to my prayer, you servants of God, do you want to rebuild our Jerusalem? Do you want us to gather again? or is it enough to be church in our homes until Atlas shrugs ... or we don't know when?

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. Amen.

Hymn of the Day Nehemiah's Prayer – Michael Maher

Click here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dT3Ltv_UVP0

The main prayer below was accessed through the Xavier University website, at: <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/coronavirus-prayers> and written by *Sister Christine Koelhoeffer, IHM*. The final two petitions were added based on our context for this Sunday.

A Coronavirus Prayer:

Loving God, Your desire is for our wholeness and well being.

We hold in tenderness and prayer the collective suffering of our world at this time.

We grieve precious lives lost and vulnerable lives threatened.

We ache for ourselves and our neighbors, standing before an uncertain future.

We pray: may love, not fear, go viral.

Inspire our leaders to discern and choose wisely, aligned with the common good.

Help us to practice social distancing and reveal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and in solidarity.

Call us to profound trust in your faithful presence,

You, the God who does not abandon.

We add to these prayers our prayers for the all those who are preparing to return to school, And for those who have lost beloved family members in the past weeks:

May your Spirit walk alongside them to comfort them. Amen.

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
 thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread;
 and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;
 and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. **AMEN.**

While you listen to the offertory hymn, continue your prayers and consider how you may be an offering in the coming week.**Offertory – Christ has Arisen, Alleluia**

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqbD58GJAQk>

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Offering Prayer

God of goodness and growth,
 all creation is yours,
 and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
 Water and word, social distancing and hand-washing:
 these are signs of your abundant grace.
 Nourish us through these gifts,
 that we might proclaim your steadfast love
 in our communities and in the world,
 through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn: Stay with Us

Click here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_67Uu7hBsc

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Blessing:

May God bless us and keep us.
 May the face of God shine upon us with grace and mercy.
 May God look upon us with favor
 and give us ☩ peace.
 Amen.

Dismissal: Go in Peace, Go in Hope. *Thanks be to God.*

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