

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**

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Scripture: Nehemiah 3-8

***"Let Us Arise and Build (part 2)"***

**PROVERBS 29:18**

Please take out your Bibles and turn to **Proverbs 29:18**: ***"Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained; but happy is he who keeps the law."*** The old KJV reads *"Without a vision the people perish."* The NIV says, *"Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint."*

The Hebrew translated "vision," means a revelation from God. But it is not merely receiving that revelation but being obedient to it that is most important, as the second half of the verse implies. In other words, when there is no direction from the Living God, people will wander spiritually and morally, but when a nation obeys the Lord it will be blessed. This holds true for the Church as well.

**THE VISION AND MISSION OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S**

My friends we have begun to look at what the Lord is calling us to do together as His Church in the coming years. We have called this faith journey ***"Let Us Arise and Build."*** echoing Nehemiah's vision to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and the people of God's response.

Nehemiah was given the vision by the Lord and he communicated it to the people. In the same way, God has given us a vision - begun many years ago - to be a Christ-centered, Bible believing Anglican Church committed to the Great Commission.

If the vision is what we are to be, the mission is how the vision is fulfilled. Our mission is one that flows from God's Word: *"to proclaim the love and truth of the Lord Jesus Christ in word and deed by the power of the Spirit and to the glory of God the Father."*

I came to St. Bart's with this vision in mind. The only difference now is that we are truly Anglican and no longer Episcopalian. I have seen how the Lord has sustained us and , increased our numbers, particularly in attendance

**WHY ANGLICAN?**

Why Anglican? The Anglican Church is rooted in the Catholic tradition. When we speak of the Catholic tradition we are speaking of Roman Catholics and

Eastern Orthodox believers as well. We make up the Catholic faith which adheres to the Creeds, Apostolic Succession, the Sacraments and the Word of God. The difference with the Anglican Church is that it allowed itself to be reformed in the 1500's doing away with many of the unscriptural practices that had crept into the Roman Catholic Church over the centuries. And yet we retain the emphasis on the Holy Eucharist every Sunday. In fact, we climax our service with receiving the Body and Blood of our Lord. We end with the proclamation of Christ's death, resurrection and the promise of His return.

And so we are both Scriptural and Sacramental. It is a perfect balance. And it is why I am Anglican. I have had experience in the Roman Catholic Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Baptist Church. But I believe it is the Anglican Church that offers the perfect balance. And it is, I believe, why Satan attacked Anglicanism so vigorously. But we know that if we stay true to God's Word and stand firm, Satan will flee.

He has no place in the Church and the way we keep it that way is by remaining faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ and to His Holy Word.

Now if we know the vision and the mission, what is each member's role in fulfilling the vision and mission?

### **BACK TO NEHEMIAH**

We need to return to Nehemiah to get the answers. Nehemiah is such a powerful book that we could do a whole series of a dozen or so messages on each chapter. But what I would like to do is highlight some key passages throughout the book to show what we are to be about as we move forward together on this faith journey called "Let us Arise and Build."

First, turn with me to **chapter 3**. Here each group is assigned to restore sections of the wall. Each section included a particular "gate." In fact, there are eleven different gates and landmarks listed. Most of the rebuilding occurred along the Eastern section of the city where the Temple of the Lord had been located and consisted of about two miles of wall. Rebuilding a city wall was imperative in ancient times for it symbolized the strength of the city, and it protected the city from wild animals, intruders and invaders; even more so for Jerusalem, for it was the place of the Temple of God. While chapter 3 helps us understand the topography of ancient Jerusalem, some of which is still evident today, it also shows what is necessary if any project is to be completed for the Lord

If you look at the task of rebuilding the wall individually it is overwhelming but if everybody works together and understands their role, much can be accomplished. In fact, to the amazement of the naysayers and enemies, the

people of God rebuilt the walls in 52 days! (**Neh. 6:15**).

In **chapter 4** we see that the work is ridiculed. There is always opposition to the work of God. We faced much opposition while we were in the Episcopal Church and we were the subject of ridicule in many Episcopal Churches and by many Episcopal priests. But that's to be expected. It comes with the territory. Now we have been set free from that, but we still have to do spiritual battle with Satan. Notice that Nehemiah responds three ways with this opposition. He prays, he sets up groups to be watchmen, and he trusts in God and continues to move forward. Why do you think we have people in the prayer room? to be watchmen. The Word says our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against supernatural evil. (**cf. Eph. 6:10-12**)

In **chapter 5**, the poor complain of the abuse and injustices that have been perpetrated by their wealthier brethren. In addition, the people had been taken advantage of by previous governors. One of the things we find out is that Nehemiah is appointed governor of Judah by the Persian King Artaxerxes. And Nehemiah will not tolerate wrongdoing. Not only does he tell the leaders this has to stop their abuse of power, but he lives by example, sacrificing many of his privileges for the people. As leaders we are called to be examples. All of us are required to sacrifice equally to the Lord in our time, talent and treasure.

In **chapter 7**, we have a listing of the exiles who returned to Jerusalem. My friends as we become stronger there will be more Episcopalian exiles who will join us. In fact, over the last five years people from at least 17 different Episcopal Churches in Western New York have joined our church family. We also see that as the people returned they also gave generously to support the work of God. Unless people are willing to give to the work of the Lord, it cannot be accomplished.

Finally, in **chapter 8**, Ezra reads the Law of God. Notice there is a hunger for God's Word (the people gather, we are told, as "one man" in the square). Do you have a hunger for God's Word? **Psalm 19:10-11: "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous, altogether, more to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey in the honeycomb."** Do you hunger for it even more than for wealth?

See too, that there is a willingness to hear the Word. Why do they gather to hear the Word of the Lord? **Romans 10:17: "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."** Ezra, the scribe, then lifts up the Word of God (the scroll of the Law). This shows that they honor God's Word. And the leaders explained the Word, giving the sense of the meaning of what was read (**Neh. 9:8**). There was a desire to handle the Word accurately. And then finally, there

is a commitment to heed the Word (**Neh. 9:9-18**). And such an adherence to God's Word led to revival among the people (cf. **Neh. 9-10**).

My friends what we have just read from Nehemiah is our call too: to know the vision and to be committed to the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. And if we are to do so, it means that we will be in prayer, it means that we stay focused on our purpose, it means the we will remain united, that we will stand firm against the attacks of the enemy, and that we will remain committed to hearing and obeying God's Word. My friends that is the recipe for success. That is how we will arise and build! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!