

Nehemiah 2.7-18

Building project week 3

I love cricket.

And like all cricket lovers, I enjoy talking about and comparing great players of the past and of today.

Who was the greatest ever batsman, bowler or fielder?

The debate can go on for hours.

But whoever cricket fans pick, I reckon most would have the greatest admiration for those cricketers who achieved greatness while appearing to put in no effort at all.

Who couldn't help but admire the cricketer who spent the whole night out partying and then turned up at the ground five minutes before play to score a swashbuckling century?

But the truth of the matter is, that most people who achieve greatness at anything do so by hard work as much as natural talent or inspiration.

Look at the current England cricket team, with no real stars, but with a good squad, who train hard and work together as a team.

Perhaps they are less glamorous than other England sides, but they have made it to number one in the world, and restored national pride in our game.

Our reading from Nehemiah this morning reminds us that what is true for cricket was true for the people of God in Nehemiah's day who sought to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and is as true for us as we seek to reorder our building.

Of course, as we've discovered already, Nehemiah's vision for restoring the walls of Jerusalem was birthed in prayer, fasting and seeking God.

Nehemiah's vision was no ill conceived plan, thought up on the spur of the moment or after too much cheese and a bad night's sleep.

No it came to life after much time spent in the quiet place before God.

But once Nehemiah was convinced of his mission from God, then he set about some very practical, hard work.

He set about eliciting the support of the king, and he asked for as much help as he could: for the king to provide safe passage and building materials (2.7-8).

When he arrives in Jerusalem, he sets about the hard work of surveying the walls, and what needs to be done to restore them (2.11-16).

And then he crafts an inspiring speech and asks the people of Jerusalem to join him in the restoration work (2.17-18).

The people, to their credit, respond to the challenge, commit to the work and with enthusiasm say, "Let us start building!" (2.18).

So, here lies the challenge to us as a church at the moment.

We have thought and prayed long and hard about our building project – for about eight years.

The Reordering sub-committee and the PCC have worked very hard on surveying the work, making plans and getting us to the point where we are just about ready to apply to the Diocese for permission to go ahead.

We have been busy asking the “powers that be” for support – we have been talking to local elected representatives and making grant applications.

Now we are in the middle of the ‘inspiring speech’.

Our building project month is the PCCs way of saying to the whole church:

“This is what God has laid on our heart:

A renewed building for the renewed mission of this church.

A place where people can gain a glimpse of heaven in our creative worship and life together.

A place where people can come in and experience the true joy of being part of the family of God.

A place from which we can go out into the community with the good news of Jesus and God’s practical love.

Now, will you come with us?

Will you work for this vision?

Will you pray for this vision?

Will you give to this vision?”

You know, the thing that strikes me about the building project in Nehemiah was that everyone played their part (chapter 3).

Nehemiah of course led, but different families repaired the bit of wall by their house. The trade associations got involved. The priests did building work.

It was a real team effort.

I believe that our project will only work if we all get involved and play our part.

When Nehemiah called for a collection to fund the work of the Temple, the leaders of the people stepped forward and gave a huge sum of money. They led by being generous.

And this encouraged the rest of the people to give what they could (7.70-72).

Our PCC has done the same.

The members of our PCC have pledged to give approximately £50,000 between them to our project.

The challenge now is, what can everyone else do to help?

I am so pleased that the Sunday school are doing what they can.

They are going to have a go at earning a few pennies by doing jobs at home, so that they can put those pennies in the pot at the gift day on 2nd October.

Over tea and coffee after the service today they are selling biscuits they have decorated, so that again, they have got something they can contribute.

It might only result in a few pounds – not a lot we might say when we need £350,000.

But I believe that in God's economy, this is a really important gift.

The kids are going to contribute what they can – and that's what matters to God.

Let me end by sharing a thought that someone shared as we prayed about the project on Tuesday morning at 6.16am:

"This project is not going to be easy. If it was, it would not bring any glory to God. God will take us to the wire."

That may be so.

Or it may be that God just pours his blessings out on us early, and come 2nd October we have all the money we need.

Either way, we cannot expect God to bless us and make the project reality if we will not play our part.

But if we work hard, pray faithfully and give generously; together as a team, we have a real chance of success.