

Nehemiah 1.1-2.6

Nehemiah's motivation

Clarence 'Frogman' Henry famously sang,
"I don't know why I love you but I do"

As any child asked "why on earth did you do that?" knows, explaining your motives for doing something is not always easy.

But motives, and motivation, are important. They get us out of bed each morning, determine how we spend our time, energy and resources, and who we spend them with. Motivation makes stuff happen.

In Nehemiah, who's life we are looking at during this our building month, we see a motivated man;

A man motivated to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem despite the fact that he lives miles away from the city and works for a foreign king;
despite the fact that the task is great, that there is much opposition from outside and much bickering within.

It would have been easy for Nehemiah to make a thousand excuses about why he couldn't set about this task of rebuilding the walls of God's city:

I live too far away.

I'm busy.

It's not my job.

It's too big a job.

There are too many obstacles.

Too much water has gone under the bridge and we're too late.

We'll manage without.

But no! Despite all these things, Nehemiah is motivated to have a go.

Why?

Well, firstly, he is motivated by a love for God, and a desire to restore God's reputation.

The American chess player in the musical Chess sings of Bangkok, "when you've seen one crowded, polluted town..."

To him, all that matters is chess, and one town is much the same as another.

But not so for Nehemiah and Jerusalem!

Jerusalem is the capital city of the Promised Land; its Zion, the city of God; home of the Temple where God has promised to dwell.

And now it stands in ruins.

And Jerusalem, the Israelites, and even God himself have become a laughingstock among the nations.

And Nehemiah can't bear it.

Nehemiah 1.4: "When I heard these words [about the state of Jerusalem] I sat down and wept, and mourned for days."

Nehemiah is not, then, concerned with walls (with bricks and mortar) per se; but rather Nehemiah is driven by a desire for the reputation of God; for the glory of God; for God's name to be honoured and adored.

And surely this must be our motivation in all that we do as Christians too.

I'd like to share with you my primary fear about the building project at St Martin's.

And it's this:

That we would fail to reach our target; and that the people around would see our failure and would say,

"Well, I guess that shows that God can't do anything; that God doesn't answer prayers. He's not much of a God really is he?"

Or that we would fail to reach our target, and people would say,

"Well, they can't love God very much down at the church; not if they can't give generously to his work."

But just imagine what it would do for God's reputation in our community if we pray like crazy, give sacrificially, and meet our target...

What might that say about the power of God and our love for him?

One church I know has the vision statement, "recovering his reputation".

We live in an age where God is so frequently maligned.

There are worse aims to have in this world than to see God's reputation restored.

The second thing that motivated Nehemiah was the character and promises of God.

As Nehemiah weeps and fasts and prays, he is reminded of God's promise that if God's people repent and turn to him, he will restore them (1.9).

And he is reminded that God is a God who can be trusted: a 'great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love' (1.5).

And so Nehemiah can pray God's character back to God,

And pray these promises of God back to God,

And say to God, "this is what you are like and this is what you've said, now please help us".

And so Nehemiah can embark upon his building project, motivated by who God is and what God has said.

Now God has not, of course, made any such promises in Scripture that he will supply the needs of the Church in Eynsford for a disabled access, loos, tea and coffee station, flexible meeting space and so on.

The only church building spoken of in the New Testament is a living temple, made not of stones but of people.

And we go forward into our building project trusting that God is a great and awesome God; able to do more than we can ever ask or imagine. That he is the God who has promised to build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail, taking Jesus at his word that if we ask, we will receive.

And we go forward into our building project trusting that after much thought and prayer, this is the right thing to do, and the right time to do it.

The third thing that motivated Nehemiah was that God had placed the project on his heart (2.11).

And we trust that it is God who has put the St Martin's building project on our hearts too.

Therefore, we press on in faith and hope.

Knowing that the building project will not be easy, but trusting that it is the task that God has set us to now.

Trusting in God's faithful character and good promises,

And determined to do whatever we can to restore his reputation in these villages; to give people reason to take notice and think positively about God.

And so that we may end up with a building worthy of such a great and awesome God, fit for our mission to give people a glimpse of heaven, provide a gateway into the family of God and from which we may go out into the world with the good news of Jesus and the practical love of God.