

Celebration

Noble Cedar Week 6: Celebrating PBO Campus Launch and Capital Campaign

Nehemiah 8

3/5/17

PITTSBORO CAMPUS

Welcome/intro/vision

And if you're new, this is an awesome Sunday to join us—our first Sunday in a new place, a new facility, a new start, and we're glad you're here!

Opening day has only happened because of the work of many people. When we first discovered this space a little over a year ago, it didn't have any electrical, no HVAC, no nothing

We didn't get any pictures of what it originally looked like, but here's a pic that I took just after the HVAC went in

And of course, here's the 'after' picture, what it looks like today—of course, much of this is due to the hard work of our contractor, Keith (with us here today?)

also recognize Tom Roberts, landlord, here with us today who's worked with us over these many months to make this happen

and at the same time much of this has happened due to the tireless efforts of dozens and dozens and dozens of volunteers.

And all of this is the culmination of over 4 YEARS of planning and praying for this day

Over 4 years ago, we started praying and asking God if he might make a way for us to open a campus here in this community in order to serve this community

And God has done this. And we get to be a part of it. Right here, right now. Together in his presence

So as we're settling in here day one, I'd like to start this morning off with some prayer, just a prayer of dedicating this new thing to the Lord. Can we pray together? PRAY

So that's the first thing that we do as Christians, we pray; the second thing we do as Christians is we capture golden moments on our iPhones.

So if you could all wave to the folks in Northern Chatham for me, I want to capture this moment and who's here for all eternity!

VIDEO: "Say hi to North Chatham folks!"

Alright, so let's talk a little bit about what this service is going to be like and how life in PBO on Sunday mornings will work

First, this is all a work in progress and we ask for an extra measure of grace and patience with us as we figure out how this room will work and how parking and greeting and sound and kids and all that stuff comes together here.

Easter is in exactly 6 weeks. And we intentionally launched this week without any public publicity, just us because we felt like we could ask our own people to be patient with us as we work out any kinks

And then, in a couple of weeks, what we're going to do is send out a mailer to roughly 16,000 of our closest friends all across Chatham County

And we're going to invite them to come and join us for Easter at one of our two wonderful locations

And we hope and pray that by then we'll be ready to receive all kinds of friends and neighbors who have been out of church for a while but whom God is working in right now to make them more open to connecting with a new church community

So particularly for these next 6 weeks we're going to ask for your patience and to help us with any feedback as we prepare to go public on Easter Sunday

Now if you're new, you might not know that we've got 2 services that are happening up in Northern Chatham at Woods Charter, first one's kicking off at 9:45.

And some of you have wondered how I'm going to do all 3 services given that teleporting has not yet been perfected.

Well the way that this will work is that I'll do each Sunday what I'm doing here and now—that is, I'll be getting up here a little earlier than we have done in the past

so that means we'll have to start a new tradition of getting here a little bit closer to on time! That could be challenging for some of us!

And after I'm done there will be more time for musical worship with our outstanding worship team

And I will leave right after I get done to get up to Woods Charter just after they get the service started to teach there.

What that means is that I won't be HERE after the service to connect with new people or with old people. That's a bummer for me because I'm a raging extrovert and I really enjoy meeting new people!

BUT, what I will do each week is I will be here early, plenty early, by 8:30 at the latest

and would love to connect with you if you're new OR if you just need to connect or share something with me, just come a little earlier, I'll be here and be glad to talk

and every so often what I'll do is have Steve Tamayo, our executive pastor, do the teaching for all the sites and that'll free me up to hang out here till everyone's gone and we shut the place down

Daylight savings time next week! So be sure to spring forward and join us here next week at 9

Those are our house-keeping things--today is all about celebration and the passage today is all about celebration, which just maybe isn't a coincidence!

We've been looking at the promise God made through Ezekiel to rebuild a conquered people into a noble cedar so that all the birds of the air and all the people all around them might be served and blessed

And we've been talking and praying about how God might make us into a noble cedar community where all kinds of people might come and take their nest

No matter where you've been, what you think about church or God, no matter how you voted or your race or ethnicity or culture or if you're new in town or been here for generations, doesn't matter what you do for a living—you're welcome here!

You're welcome here because Jesus is at the center of it all and Jesus practiced a radical hospitality

You're welcome to come and hear and see and explore what we believe is the best news in all of history:

God has done something in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection that has changed all of human history forever and changed more lives than anything else in human history.

What we're doing here in PBO is extending our branches a little further south so that all the birds of Chatham County might make their nest and rest and ultimately experience what so many of us have here: connection with God and with each other

And we've been reading how God stirred up a man named Nehemiah to be a part of re-building the city of Jerusalem as a part of fulfilling God's promise to make them into a noble cedar community

at that point that promise was almost 150 years old, and things still weren't looking so great for the Jewish people!

And last week we saw how Nehemiah rallied the whole community to re-build the walls around the city that had been in ruins for almost 150 years

And they worked so hard and God's hand was so much upon them that the entire wall around Jerusalem that had been in rubble for 150 years was re-built in just 52 days

An amazing accomplishment that was fueled both by God's favor and his grace and mercy and power over the whole project AND by the people who cooperated at extraordinary levels to make this happen

And today, we're going to see what the people do with themselves after this gigantic project is completed

Because here's the thing: all of us at points will be building or re-building something in our lives that really matters:

marriage, family, careers, a department or division at work, finances, health, faith, breaking an addiction that's had a hold of our lives, an issue in our world that breaks your heart and stirs you to action

These are major life projects! And exhausting as that is, there is also something very clarifying about an all-consuming building or re-building project.

you know what you're about, you know what you're doing, you know what's important and what matters, you know what you're doing with all your free-time!

And sometimes for some of us, when that season is over, when the marriage is saved or the addiction is beat back or our health returns

It can be a little disorienting: what do I do with myself? What matters now? And maybe we've discovered some important things during that season about ourselves and about God that we want to integrate into life after crisis!

In Nehemiah 8, the people have finished this ginormous re-building project around the city of Jerusalem

And in this chapter, they are going to show us exactly how to answer those kinds of questions. If you've got a Bible you can turn with me there now, if you don't it'll be on the screen behind me

¹ all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

² So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. ³ He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

A couple of weeks ago I heard an interview with a woman who had had a stroke a couple of years ago and woke up with most of her memory totally wiped out.

And for a while during her recovery she only had about 15 minutes of memory before she forgot what had happened, so she started to keep a journal during her recovery process and she published it as a book

Totally fascinating, haven't gotten around to the book quite yet,
but the questions swirling around her story of who am I and what am I supposed to be about after losing my memory are richly resonant with this passage

Because the people of Israel at various points in their history throughout the Old Testament do not remember who they are.

They forget God, they forget they're invited into a relationship with God, they fall out of good and important practices like worship and prayer and so they forget what's most important:

they forget that they're made in God's image and made to live with the blessing and gift of God at the center of their personal and corporate life

they have gone onto life separated from a rich and genuine rootedness in the God who made them and loves them

And this exact thing has happened to many of us in this room, hasn't it?

One of the things we love about our church is that we're full of people who have had some sort of exposure to faith at some point in their lives but they've walked away from it or drifted away from it

And many of you are here re-discovering or maybe discovering for the very first time these larger realities about God and yourself and how you might re-enter into or enter into for the first time a genuine relationship with God

Where the life-giving connection with the God of the universe is at work re-shaping your life in ways that you've been missing out on, maybe for decades

Well after this massive re-building project is completed in Nehemiah, the people of Israel call on Ezra to rebuild them spiritually. Because re-building that wall is ONE part of what it means for them to be a people

But if they re-build their wall but do not re-build their faith in the God who is Lord over that wall, then none of their work will matter

If they re-build their physical wall but the wall of their hearts and minds in relation to God is still in shambles, then it will just be an empty façade, a shell, a work that will not last.

This is hard for us, because for many of us, we KNOW the stuff in our lives that's broken down: families, friendships, marriages, careers, budgets, neighborhoods—those problems scream at us!

And tackling those building or re-building projects in our lives takes up a ton of our energies and resources

But we're often blind to the spiritual side of things, aren't we? Because it's quieter, because our relationship with God is often more subtle, not as obvious, sometimes we neglect it

But here's the reality: for every single earthly building or re-building work you could ever engage in, there are spiritual realities that correspond and relate to it

AND, that work is MORE important, not less important than any physical or earthly work we have to do

In Israel's story, there was a wall in place 150 years earlier when Babylon had come up against Jerusalem—a great, big strong wall BUT Israel at that point had abandoned God—so do you know how much good that wall did for them? Zero!

They put their faith in the wall instead of the God who was Lord over that wall and they were over-run and decimated

A physically re-built Jerusalem wall without a re-built faith in the God who was Lord over Jerusalem was a sitting piñata, just waiting for the next superpower to come and knock it back over again

Your rebuilt marriages, budgets, families, businesses, and volunteer work

if there's not a spiritual covering, a spiritual undergirding, a deeper and more eternal spiritual rootedness to it, it's just a sitting piñata, waiting for the next storm to knock over again

THIS RENOVATED and REBUILT FACILITY, which we are so excited about--without a strong faith, is just a piñata.

It's here, but it's just waiting for a storm to hit and knock it all down again

There are all kinds of great beautiful old church buildings around Chatham that are sitting nearly empty this morning and dying

in part because some of them got more hung up on the building and the institution of the church and forgot the spiritual work of the church

Question: is there a place where you are engaged in a very important building or re-building project in your personal life—work, personal, relationships, finances, health, an issue in our world

Where there is corresponding SPIRITUAL work that you might be tempted to neglect? What would it look like to instead dig into the spiritual side as well as the physical side of that work?

Nehemiah and Ezra are looking to re-build a people who will last, so as they are done re-building their wall, they are seriously engaging the work of re-building their faith

And they do so by opening up the Scriptures and letting it inform their understanding of who they are, who God is, and what they're supposed to be about.

Week in and week out here at Chatham Community Church, in small groups and on Sunday mornings, we're going to open up the Scriptures, read what they say, hopefully make sense of it all for us so that we can all understand it

Because if you want to know the answers to the most important questions in life, beyond the mere circumstances, beyond the crisis of the day or the week or even the month or the year

If you really want to know who you are, who God is, and what God has put you and I here to do, the Scriptures are the place where we get those deep, resonant, most important answers.

And so the people of Israel do so, but it takes an unexpected turn, let's keep reading

⁹ And Nehemiah... and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.

¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way. Enjoy choice food and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

¹¹ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." ¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

Here's my true confession as a speaker, when I see people being moved by something that we're talking about, I keep at it!

If people are crying, there must be something good happening here, I'm doing something right!

So the people here in this text are crying as they're hearing the law

Generally throughout the Old Testament when the law is read and people weep, it's because they're convicted about their sin.

So this is likely what's happening, as they're all hearing and understanding the book of the law for the first time in their lives.

"Yikes! This is our book, this is our God, these are our promises and warnings and this is what we've forfeited! This is WHY we are a conquered and over-run people! God warned us, we neglected his word to us!"

They feel exposed, cut to the quick, they see where they've fallen short and how far they've fallen short

And so they begin to weep. And then Ezra and Nehemiah in concert do something that those of us who do this kind of thing for a living would never do!

They slam the book of the Law shut immediately!

Don't weep! Don't cry! This day is HOLY! Three times they tell the people to not cry because of the holiness of the day

Now if you're like most Americans, the thought of a holy day doesn't sound like a reason to party like it's 1999!

But Nehemiah and Ezra are emphatic: because the day is a holy day, they are not to cry or weep. In fact, they are to go and party because this day is a day DEDICATED to the Lord

See, when you feel exposed and then feel shame or guilt, who's that all about? What's the noun associated with the shame or guilt we feel when we're exposed?

ME! My sin, my guilt, my shame! Me is at the center of all of that.

And those things were REAL and they mattered, and Nehemiah and Ezra are going to deal with those eventually

But that's never where we start in our lives with God. Life with God is first and foremost about who God is and what God is up to

And if we're talking about a day where we first discover or re-discover the core of who God is, what God is about

his holiness, his beauty, his goodness, his kindness and his love

Then there's ONLY one possible sane response once we see how GOOD God is!: throw a party.

Throw a big party. All day long. And make sure that everyone gets in. Make sure that everyone gets plenty so that all are taken care of

And so that's what they do. All day long.

Why throw a party?

Nehemiah says it right here: ***for the joy of the Lord is your strength.***"

The JOY of the Lord is our strength. God is joyful, full of joy and love, he's generous and good,

His disposition is wonderful. His love is enormous. His rules are just and good.

He treats people with kindness. His grace is overwhelming.

He is generous and merciful, he is all beauty and goodness and laughter and love.

He makes huge promises and follows through on them over and over and over again

The Being who has the most power to influence our lives and shape our experiences is better than we could have ever asked or dreamed or imagined

He has no character flaws, no faults; he is nothing but perfect goodness. If this was your boss at work, it would change everything about your job

As it is, he's your God, and it changes everything about every aspect of your life if you'll let him

If you do not yet know this God, hear this good news: God has sent his Son and spent all of his own Son's blood so that you might be reconciled to him

In order that you might gain entrance to HIS party where he might sing with joy over you forever and every amen.

And so Nehemiah and Ezra call the people to celebrate. And so today, PBO opening day, we are called to celebrate, too, not just because of this space and this service

There's something deeper and much more long-term and permanent that fuels our celebration:

The joy of the Lord is your strength, our strength, the hope that we have for this space to be useful for him and his kingdom

And because the joy of the Lord is our strength, we have reason to celebrate. His power and might have propelled us to this place and gotten us here

And because the joy of the Lord is our strength, we have reason to celebrate not only what God has done here in getting this service off the ground

We also have reason to celebrate what God is doing across our whole church across the county!

Because we're ONE church in two locations. Eventually we're hoping it goes to three locations one noble cedar with branches spread out across Chatham County for all kinds of people to be served and to loved and introduced or re-introduced to this good and generous God, so that all peoples might know and experience that the joy of the Lord is our strength

Can you imagine how much good would happen in this county if all of us, starting right here, built our whole lives around the joy of the Lord?

Last week, after four weeks of talking about what it would look like for our church to become a noble cedar kind of community

we asked everyone to consider making a financial commitment towards purchasing land for our Northern Chatham Site to eventually build a building

We even boldly asked this even of those of you coming here, because we're one church serving one mission, becoming this Noble Cedar kind of church community TOGETHER across Chatham

AND as one expression of that, for the past 3 years we've been putting aside 10% of monies anyone and everyone gave to pay for the renovation of this place

AND eventually down the road if all goes well, it'll be Pittsboro's turn for a building of some sort and we'll ask everyone to contribute towards that

And finally as an important precedent, this campus got a small chunk from the capital campaign, about \$10,000, to do whatever work the team needed to do here.

So last week we invited everyone to consider making a financial commitment if they could by dropping a commitment card in a cedar box up at the front during worship

And all week long I've had conversations about how rich it was to see this long line of people committing to pray and give to make our community this noble cedar we believe God has called us to be—the spirit of unity and enthusiasm was palpable!

And commitments have continued to come in over the course of this week from people who weren't there last Sunday or weren't ready to make their final commitment

And we invite you, if you weren't there, to doing your own praying and consider making a commitment towards the Noble Cedar capital campaign

But this morning I'm delighted to give you an update on what we've received so far, again, we're expecting a few more to trickle in over the next week or two

First, we were blown away by the participation rate. As of today we have 100 families who have committed to giving to the Capital Campaign.

If you compare that number to our core givers, those are the folks who have some sort of a track record of ongoing giving

we had 92 core givers in 2016, so to have more people getting more involved and committing themselves financially than ever before

Thank you, thank you thank you!!

Our public goal for this campaign was \$300k, that would pay for the land on Andrews Store Rd. and the capital campaign

As we've tallied up all the gifts and commitments, our total pledged and already given is currently sitting at \$395,000

God is good, amen? God is good and y'all are generous, celebrate good times, c'mon! thank you, thank you, thank you.

I was considering selling a kidney on Ebay this week to get it to an even \$400k but my wife stopped me

Now the reason why I'm STILL asking you to seriously consider and pray about your role in this if you've been thinking about it but just haven't made a commitment yet is this.

This first capital campaign is just for the land purchase—and in fact, if you've felt a disturbance in the force in Chatham County recently, it's because we've closed on the land!

It's ours! Go have a picnic on it if you'd like, just be sure to clean up after yourself!

So this campaign is to get us to be able to buy that land over the course of the next two years, and the cost of that land is \$250k.

But the actual building is going to be a much bigger price tag

That's going to be the next capital campaign on down the road

But every dollar that we get over and above what we need to pay for the land is going to go towards making the actual building of this thing a possibility:

All the site work, utilities, design, architect, every gift gets us a step closer towards that building going up that we hope will one day be a high-traffic community center that will serve all the birds of the air

So we're going to humbly ask you, if you've been here for a while and this is your church home and you haven't yet made a commitment, to prayerfully consider helping us to move closer to closing that gap

But today, between what's happening right here right now with this service as the culmination of years and years of praying and planning

AND with this capital campaign going so very well, we have much to celebrate!

God's at work!! And the joy of the Lord is our strength!

He's answering our prayers to make us a noble cedar church community that stretches out across all of Chatham County to bring his mercy and his grace and his joy to all corners of Chatham county!

To a people who have forgotten or never known that they were made in God's image, beloved by him, who have never known that the core of God's character is JOY, we get to live out and demonstrate and proclaim the good news.

And that God who's core character is full of JOY? He REJOICES over us, he rejoices over you--HIS joy is our strength, HIS joy over us is our great hope

and HIS joy over us is the energy to sustain us through whatever challenges, whatever obstacles, whatever road blocks we come up against

The joy of the Lord is our strength, will be our strength—it's a joy that doesn't deny or cover up hard stuff, but that is strong enough to face the hard stuff and deal with it head-on.

Today, we celebrate. The Lord is good, and he is with us and he is for us and he is working for us to build us into this noble cedar kind of a church community

Not because we're so great, but because God is so great. As you go home today, CELEBRATE, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

PRAY