

**Sunday, October 22, 2017 – Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Preacher: Rev. Douglas J. Brouwer**

**Scripture: Nehemiah 5:1-13 and Luke 14:28-30**

**Sermon title: “Love, Loans ... and the Money Crunch”**

Note: On September 10, I began a sermon series based on the Book of Nehemiah, with guidance and insight provided by the “minor classic” *Hand Me Another Brick*, a book by the American pastor Charles R. Swindoll. The readings from Nehemiah will be the focus of the sermon, with the second reading providing further illumination or insight.

1. As Swindoll puts it, “Because the Book of Nehemiah illustrates nearly every major principle of leadership, we shouldn’t be surprised to find that Nehemiah faced the money issue” (p.96). If talk about criticism and discouragement (the topics for the last two weeks) makes us uncomfortable, I’m guessing that we have similar feelings about money and financial planning. Aside from financial planners (a new and growing field) is there anyone who really, truly feels comfortable with this topic? What issues and concerns does it raise for you?
2. Our story in chapter 5 begins with a strike among the workers. Labor issues are not new! Nehemiah, to his credit, sized up the situation quickly: a) there were some with large families who did not have enough to eat (5:2), b) there were others who owned property, but who had to mortgage their homes and property because of spiraling inflation (5:3), and c) there were still others who were in heavily in debt, unable to pay back what they owed (5:4-5). Understanding the situation was a good start, but Nehemiah also had to understand why the situation developed in the first place. Can you give the reasons from reading the story? **Famine** (vs. 3), **taxes** (vs. 4 tells us that good old Artaxerxes, like many political leaders before and after, was taxing the people heavily, **usury** (vs. 5 tells us that those who had money to lend were charging their neighbors exorbitant interest rates). All of this was a recipe for a failing economy. And in these situations, real leaders lead. What did Nehemiah do?
3. To fully appreciate this story, we should know something about the Mosaic Law and its position on lending money for interest. See Exodus 22:25. Also Deuteronomy 23:19-20. Swindoll asks us to notice the promise attached to the command: “If you obey [by not charging interest], I will bless you so much more than the interest you would gain by exploiting your own brothers.” See also Leviticus 25:35-40. No Jew was ever to enslave another Jew. So...what was Nehemiah’s response to all of this? “I was very angry,” Nehemiah tells us. Was this anger justified? Can righteous indignation sometimes lead to positive results?
4. How did Nehemiah “settle down” and achieve some positive results? In other words, what steps did he take? I like 5:7 ... “I consulted with myself.” What do you suppose this means? That he thought before he spoke, maybe? What else?
5. Vs. 5 tells us that Nehemiah “contended with the nobles and the rulers.” He

confronted them with their behavior, which was not in alignment with the Mosaic Law. I think vs. 9, in particular, is remarkable: “You are losing your distinction in the eyes of the surrounding nations.” What do you suppose that means? And is there a principle we could apply here to other parts of our lives? (Never give the Sanballats in our lives more ammunition?)

6. Vs. 8 ... what was the response of the ruling elite to Nehemiah’s words? “They were silent and could not find a word to say.” So, I suppose they felt convicted. This is remarkable. A fellow recently arrived from Persia was able to speak with considerable authority to people he had never met by appealing to ... what?
7. But Nehemiah didn’t simply rebuke them. What other steps did he take? List them. Vs. 13 is arguably the most interesting ... Realize the serious nature of your vow to God!
8. Some principles and leadership lessons:
  - a) God is pleased when we handle our money wisely
  - b) Prolonged personal sin takes a heavy toll on God’s work in your life
  - c) Correcting any problem begins by facing it head-on
  - d) Correction is carried out most effectively when we seal it with a promise, and preferably in public.