

Prayer of Preparation (responsive)

Leader: May the words of my mouth,

People: and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

All: Amen.

The work is done. The work of building the Temple and the walls is done. There have been starts and stops, opposition and resistance, but at last the work is done.

The gates have been set in place, the gate keepers have been assigned, and the work of building the Temple and the walls is done. The disgrace that was Jerusalem is almost gone.

Now it's time for the people to come live in the city. It's time for the city to become a home for people. A people who have a new vision of God and how God works in the world. Nehemiah undertakes a census, another count, of who is there and what they have. An accounting of it all.

An accounting of everyone. Everyone except those who opposed the rebuilding. Those people were not named. They didn't receive a note in the census, we don't know who they are and we never will. It's as if they are being blotted out. We will never know who they are; their story has been lost.

This is a story of faith. Faith in God. Faith in God's work. Faith in the people God sends to lead. Ezra and Nehemiah's stories are steeped in faith and we see it from the beginning.

How were the people able to return? God heard their cry and God intervened. Not God coming down from heaven; rather, God working in the hearts of men who didn't know anything about the God of the Jews. God worked in their hearts through faith of the people.

That's where the gospel lesson finds us today. With men who are hurting, ill, and removed from their community. Men who are seeking mercy. Men who are seeking restoration.

We are here today because we too are seeking mercy. We are here today because we are seeking restoration. This is the story of how God heard the cries for mercy. This is the story of people who believed in God and kept crying out because their faith said that one day God would answer. This is the story of a tireless faith.

This is the story of faith that survived exile. This is the story of faith that God would provide what was needed to rebuild. This is a story of faith that God's mercy never fails. This is the story of how God works in, through, and with people to accomplish God's work.

This is also God's story of how God intends to heal the world. This is the story of how God intends to heal us, to restore us, to transform us into the people God intends us to be. This is not just Ezra's story. This is not just Nehemiah's story. This is not just the story of Persian kings and the people from long ago who opposed the building. This is our story.

Us. Here and now. Having faith in God's mercy. Having faith that we are doing the work God wants us to do. Having faith in the people God sends to lead. This is the story of how we are part of God's plan for the salvation of the world.

This is also a story of celebration, of praising God in a loud voice to all the world. We have been celebrating for a week...telling the world that we are overjoyed that God has brought us here and God has plans for us for another 125 years.

Today we begin the story of celebration. Taking time out to celebrate everyone who has had a hand in bringing us here to this very day. Our narthex is open, the tower is completed, the steps and rails are done. We are continuing the work of those who served at St. Paul's and planted a mission center for this community. Let us take a moment to bless our newly remodeled space.

Pray with me please:

In the beginning, before time existed, God's Spirit hovered over this place, leaving holy and sacred imprints of grace---

Waiting-

Anticipating –

the transforming miracles that would flow...

In this place--

A place renovated and renewed, a place to deepen the imprint of God's church called Grace,

In this place,

In this space,

God's vision of the kin-dom is renewed.

A place that will reflect the spirit of this community in its concern for the quality of life of every person...a

building...which reflects the ministry within the local church.

The foundation of this building was laid upon land, dripping with grace, overflowing with seeds from which miracles would arise.

Countless lives have been forever changed because of the ministry and the leaders who have come into this place to pray, learn, lead, and follow God's Spirit out into our communities sharing the life altering love of Jesus.

And now, we gather to bless anew this space...

redesigned to help us better serve a changing world—

A world that still cries out for miracles of God's redemptive and healing love.

Our prayers of blessing join the prayers that have deeply blessed this place for generations.

Our prayers of hope join the prayers of hope that have transformed countless lives since God's Spirit hovered over this land eons ago.

As we pray our prayers of blessing for this space, may we also recommit ourselves to be agents of God's redemptive love so that all may know and claim the power of faith in Jesus Christ.

Amen...