

Just Another Brick in the Wall

Pink Floyd, the famous rock group whose most popular album was, "Just Another Brick in the Wall." It was written by Roger Waters who suffered some huge challenges in his early life. He lost his father as a child and so for him walls were being erected. However, his music gave him release but during one of his concerts in 1977, a fan was invited onto the stage and the fan spat on Roger's face. That caused Roger to feel distanced from his fans and build another wall. According to the band, the "wall" is the self-isolating barrier we build over the course of our lives, and the "bricks in the wall" are the people and events that turn us inward and away from others."

Today our theme is about walls.

Walls feature in the Bible, some are built like the wall of Jerusalem and some come tumbling down like the walls of Jericho.

Walls are made usually to keep others out or to keep people in.

We all construct walls of our own making – some are helpful and some are just troublesome.

A wall can make us feel safe because we can hide behind it and not show our true identity.

Walls come in all shapes and sizes – visible and invisible - and some are built to protect, to guard, to keep people safe and the opposite to keep others out.

So, walls can be positive but they can also be negative.

The Berlin Wall was built to separate the East from the West. A wall of division as was the wall in Northern Ireland.

But do you remember the happiness when the Berlin Wall fell in 9th of November 1989.

As we begin the new year, it may be good to ask, what kind of walls are we building as we begin a new year – are they positive or negative?

Jerusalem, God's city. The city of peace was built with large walls to protect the peace of the city.

That was until the Babylonians destroyed the city and the walls in 597 B.C.

70 years later, God searched for a man to help rebuild the walls.

Nehemiah, a Jew, who was exiled in Babylon, he was that trusted man – he was the King's cupbearer – the King's bodyguard. He was in a position of authority of trust. He was responsible that the King would come to no harm.

To reach this position he would have laid a lot of bricks on his journey to the place of responsibility. His life was like a strong wall that the King could depend on.

It is in the palace that he has the King's ear, and it is in the palace that he meets with his fellow Jews, who had travelled to him with bad news, tragic news of what was happening in his homeland.

They said, “those who survived the exile, are back in the province, and they are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and the gates have been burned with fire.” In the heart of the Bible, we have a story about this incredible wall builder who wanted to build walls to bring peace.

God has a task for him, and that task was to go back to Jerusalem, and to rally the people to rebuild the walls of the city.

For the demolished wall of Jerusalem represented many things.

It represented that God's honour had been trashed.

It represented that Jerusalem, God's city had been violated.

It represented that God's city was defenceless and there was no security and anybody could attack it.

“Cometh the hour cometh the man!”. God had been preparing Nehemiah for this moment.

He lays it on Nehemiah's heart that he has to become a fixer of the wall.

This week many tributes have been paid to Archbishop Desmond Tutu – Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1984. He was a fixer of walls. He was the repairer of broken relationships. He was head hunted to be the one who would reconcile black and white in South Africa. He straddled the divide

and stood up to apartheid. God used him to build walls of peace through the Truth and Reconciliation process.

He saw the need.

He was a Nehemiah of his day. The walls that he was rebuilding was not of bricks but of human flesh.

His funeral service was yesterday and the president of South Africa said that Tutu helped to build the rainbow nation of South Africa.

What an incredible man was Desmond Tutu.

When you look at his life, his whole life was about openness, vulnerability and love. He embraced all people. He saw all people as equal in the eyes of God. There was no wall between him and others.

So, he was the right person at the right time. He was the moral compass and the spiritual leader.

Archbishop Justin Welby paid tribute to him but he also said that that "The Arch" as Desmond Tutu was known in episcopalian , was simply following the light of Christ and it was Christ's light that shone through him.

The issue is that we all have something to rebuild in our lives. The Bible says that we have all gone astray. There are no perfect people, and so Jesus comes into the world to seek and save the lost. He comes to mend the broken hearted. He comes give sight to the blind and to make the lame walk. What walls in our lives do we need God to help us repair?

Will Smith – one of the great actors and producers of this generation excels in the recent film King Richard, about the William's sisters – the tennis stars. He plays the role of the obsessive father.

Susan gave me the gift of Will Smith's autobiography for Christmas and it is a remarkable story of a remarkable life that overcame many challenges and obstacles.

His book begins with him and his younger brother building a wall.

The wall was outside his father's business – a wall with a large hole in it. Their father was a disciplinarian with a military background. He set his young boys the challenge of repairing the wall. Every day after school, the

two boys set about the impossible task. Their father demolished the existing crumbling wall and left the boys to construct a new one – dug foundations, mixed the cement and carried the buckets.

Weekends, holidays, were all used to repair the hole in the wall.

One day the boys were complaining and grumbling about the hole in the wall.

Their father heard them and marched right over to where the boys were yapping about the hole in the wall. He snatched the brick out of Will's hand and held it up in front of them.

“Stop thinking about the wall” he said, “there is no wall. There are only bricks. Your job is to lay this brick perfectly. Then the next one. Don't be worrying about a wall. Your only concern is about one brick.”

He writes, this was a life lesson that he learned and put into practice for the rest of his life.

He writes, “The days dragged on, and as much as I hated to admit it, I started to see what he was talking about. When I focused on the wall, the job felt impossible. Never-ending. But when I focused on one brick, everything got easier, I knew that I could lay one brick at a time.

As the weeks passed, the bricks mounted, and the hole got a bit smaller. He started to see that the difference between a task that feels impossible and a task that feels doable is a matter of perspective.

And he writes that the secret to his success is as boring as it is unsurprising. You show up and lay another brick. He faced many challenges, lows and failings but his answer was, get up and lay another brick.

He writes, no matter what you are going through, there is always another brick sitting right there in front of you. Waiting to be laid. The only question is are you going to get up and lay it.

One year on and the final brick was laid. His father came out of the office to examine the wall. He studied the wall and turned to his two young boys and said, “Now, don't you ever tell me there is something you can't do.”

As we start another year, how do we cope – how do we build for the future?

Desmond Tutu said “Do your little bit of good where you are; it is those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.” ~

We build a brick at a time. What is the first brick that you need to lift today. Don't look at the unsurmountable wall. Look for the first brick.

On the other hand, what wall do you need to demolish today?

What might that be, what is your first step, a telephone call, a text message, a card, getting out of your bed in the morning, yes, to many people, this may be a brick that they need to lift each morning.

Jesus, the carpenter, was the master builder, he knew all about building things to last.

So it comes as no surprise when he says to his people, *the wise man builds his house on the rock*. He dug deep and laid foundations.

Jesus was speaking about his teachings, it comes after the Sermon on the Mount. But the Apostle Paul took it another step further. In Ephesians 2:20 he writes, that God's church has "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." Our foundation and therefore our walls are perfect, if we have indeed based our belief and behaviours on our sure and solid Saviour.

This is where our building work needs to begin. Nehemiah began his work in prayer and asking God to help. Archbishop Tutu found his inspiration in Jesus; and Will Smith found his, through the faith and love of his gran who was wholly committed to Jesus.

Today, as we begin a new year, may you find the strength to build your lives upon the sure foundation of Jesus Christ.

Amen.