

BREAD FOR THE WORLD SUNDAY 2018

Sermon Note Reflections on Nehemiah 2:7-8 and Mark 10:35-45

By Bishop Don Williams

Nehemiah 2:7-8

It is a wonderful and awesome thing when a person does not forget where she or he comes from. I have known people who have overcome many difficulties in life and have become successful in careers that they never would have imagined. The problem is that sometimes these people forget where they came from and forget the people that helped them along the way. Nehemiah was not such a person. He had obtained, as we say, a good government job working as the cupbearer for the King.

However, he never forgot where he came from and he never forgot his people. It was his compassion that touched the heart of the King. He shared with the King the plight of his people and also his desire to help them. In other words, he was an advocate and went to the head of the government to plead his case. He asked the King for letters. One letter was to be given to the governors in order for Nehemiah to be able to pass through the provinces freely. The other letter was to be given to the keeper of the King's forest who was able to provide the resources needed to build the wall. These letters provided protection and resources.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., attained a great education and a great position but never forgot his people. We who are brothers and sisters of the diaspora should use our voice to help the least of us. A letter would really help.

Mark 10:35-45

There is an old saying: "Be careful what you ask for because you just might get it." I have seen this saying played out in both personal and political contexts. How many times have you asked God for something and did not get it, only to find out years later that you were so thankful you didn't get what you asked for.

James and John let ambition, position, and selfishness ask for something that was not theirs to have. Jesus let them know that they would indeed drink of the cup and be baptized with the same baptism he would experience, but they will find out that it will not be what they are expecting.

Jesus had to remind them that those who desire to be great must be a servant of all. This is what I love about the work of Bread for the World. Most Bread for the World members are people who are not suffering from hunger and poverty but, like Nehemiah, have a sense of compassion and justice. It does not matter your sex, race, or class; it only matters that you are hungry and in need. Bishop Desmond Tutu put it this way:

"I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the gospel. Period. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned for the whole person. When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say, 'Now is that political or social?' He said: 'I feed you'—because good news to a hungry person is Bread."

Bishop Don Williams serves on the board of bishops of the United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic).



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