

Date; May 1, 2022

Texts: Ezra 1 - 3 (1.5... 3.3, 11-12...)

Title: "From the Ruins..."

## **Intro -**

from the ruins - comes the opportunity to rebuild

cf. - per "Alpha Workshop" in NYC back in April -

conceived as a response to the church coming out of  
the pandemic...

envisioned as an opportunity to gather - as church leaders -  
and listen -

- listen for opportunities that might "speak"  
in these times...

relate per newsletter - "As we rebuild from the ruins of a global pandemic,  
some will default to quick fixes. Others will rush to radical  
reinvention. And even more will give way to the gravitational  
pull of trying to reclaim all that once was..."

cf. - our "ruins" are real...

but they are also different from the image that many folks hold

in their minds when the word "ruins" is tossed about -

namely - broken structures... bombed out buildings...

scorched earth... stones torn down such that what  
was once there - is no longer...

cf. - this is what the Israelites in the time of Ezra faced -

the ruined remains of having been defeated in war some 70 years prior...

the neglect that settled over the land as it was left in a tattered  
and forlorn condition, but...

the promise had been given - that they would return

a promise that finds its fulfillment in this proclamation from

Cyrus, King of Persia - who had a much more tolerant and generous  
policy when it came to those who were his vassals...

and so he opens the door to something new... something challenging...  
but - something that held the clarion note of “hope”  
yes - their homeland - the *promised* land -  
was in ruins...  
but this was their chance... their calling...  
to rebuild  
- what would they do with that...?  
(what might we...?)

### **I) Hearts Moved by God**

the workshop used Ezra 1 - 3 as the framework, beginning with  
the observation from 1.5 that:  
“Everyone whose heart God had moved - prepared to go up and  
build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem...”  
i.e. - the work of rebuilding from out of the ruins  
does not stem from our own initiative, or...  
from our own designs...  
rather - it depends on the work of God...  
the nudging of His Spirit...  
his movement in our hearts -  
to do something  
(because - when we look at “what is...”  
we see with the eyes of God...  
we feel with the heart of God...  
and - we realize that something can - and, needs to be - done...)  
so...  
has God moved your heart?  
(and - what exactly do I mean by that?)  
relate - in the course of his life, Martin Luther King walked through  
“many dangers, toils and snares...” - but through it all  
he knew that God was walking with him.

God had “moved his heart to prepare him... to equip him...  
for the work he had for him...” - and this gave him the strength  
and the courage to face the ruins he was called to rebuild  
cf. - per Ps. 139, where the poet says of the Lord:  
“You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it”  
i.e. - life is fragile and full of danger, but -  
we can draw comfort from the knowledge that God is with us, in all that we do.  
when risk-taking is called for...  
when our next step leads us into the unknown...  
- God can give an inner peace...  
... a peace that gives us courage and confidence...  
inspiration and insight...  
serenity and strength...  
freeing us to do God’s will -  
because he has moved our hearts so to do...  
because he has filled our hearts so to respond

## **II) Build the Altar First**

the next highlight from Ezra comes from 3.3 -  
“despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar  
on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord...”  
cf. - the altar functioned as the “welcome mat” for  
the presence of God  
i.e. - any effort at rebuilding what lay in ruins...  
needed to be grounded in the experiential reality  
of God - present among the people  
relate - how does this function... happen...  
in our lives?  
i.e. - we are not sacrificing burnt offerings in both  
the morning and the evening...

but - what are we doing...?

what do we need to “rebuild first...”?

if we are to be grounded in and surrounded by  
the presence of God?

(a suggestion...) -

fellowship... being together - physically - as God’s people...  
God’s family...

and - as with the people of Ezra’s day -

this may be something that calls for us to overcome fear

- a fear that is very real...

- a fear that that still remembers...

but - a fear that we need to own, and engage with -

and ask of it -

what have we lost...?

how can we rebuild that...?

note - for some, this may be a fear that needs to be managed

i.e. - compromised health has always been a limiting factor

and - these days... with the Covid mutating and ever-present

it can be more so

which makes the question then -

*how* can we rebuild...

*how* can we “put out the welcome mat for God...”

in a way that all know they are welcomed?

that all know they are valued?

that all find their place at the table - with God?

cf. - per Henri Nouwen:

“To be a witness for God is to be a living sign of God's presence in  
the world. What we *live* is more important than what we say,  
because the right way of living always leads to the right way of speaking.

When we forgive our neighbors from our hearts,  
our hearts will speak forgiving words...

When we are grateful, we will speak grateful words,  
and when we are hopeful and joyful,  
we will speak hopeful and joyful words.”

and...

God will find a welcome among a people  
whose lives need to be rebuilt...

### III) A Range of Emotions

cf. - this can be tough sledding, as reflected in the third insight from Ezra:

“And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord...

But many older priests and Levites... who had seen the former  
temple, wept aloud...”

there is great joy for something new -

especially for those who knew not of what was old...

and - there is sorrow / lament for those who knew what had been there before

and - missed it

i.e. - the challenge of rebuilding from the ruins that accrued these  
past few years

must needs address different generations...

different experiences and expectations...

must not cling too dearly to what was meaningful at the time...

while also acknowledging that what was meaningful -

was meaningful -

because it brought people into the presence of God

- how do we “thread the needle” and move forward in a way

that acknowledges... that “owns...” -

both sets of experiences?

relate - consider these thoughts from Ron Rolheiser:

“Biblically, we have the great tradition within which revelation from God

is understood to come mostly through the stranger, the foreigner,

the unexpected, the unfamiliar, in what’s different, in the surprise...

For this reason the Scriptures insist on the importance of welcoming strangers.

Since God is “Other” - strangers, among all others, are the most likely to be carrying God's revelation.

and sometimes - those “strangers” might be seated right next to you...

(he continues) -

There's a Chinese greeting that works as both a blessing and a curse.

You say to someone: “May you live in interesting times!”

We live in such times and, indeed, it's both a blessing and a curse.

We're being overwhelmed by otherness. Nothing's safe for long.

Sometimes that's both painful and disorienting.

It's not easy to have our boundaries and ideas under constant redefinition, but -

could God be speaking to us through this...?

could my brother's joy teach my something...?

could there be lessons for me in the sorrow of my sister...?

cf. - this can be tough sledding...

this can pose a challenge...

but - to follow this path is to open ourselves to

the heart of God -

who became “other” in the person of Jesus Christ to reach us...

who welcomes us home as “other” because His heart is big enough

to embrace us all

- can we be or do any less...?