Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-10 (reading book of law)

1 Corinthians 12: 12-31 (body of Christ)

We meet Nehemiah this morning when the people of Israel, who had been exiled, had returned Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Parts of our building need repair, so we spend time and effort attending to the maintenance of the building. Have not had to rebuild right from the start. No-one can deny that would have been hard work and an enormous task to take on.

But Nehemiah recognized that it was not just about the physical re-building, but that they had to also rebuild God’s nation. It is about people. The Israelites needed to be reminded about who they were, what was expected of them from God. The law book was read to all who could understand.

How can this relate to our life? We have been followers of Jesus for a long time. But do we know everything? Or do we need to be rebuilt?

Are we trying to build our church now, in relation to people? So how do we impart the foundations of our faith? In fact, sometimes when we have grown for many years, can we sometimes forget the foundations of our faith?

For Nehemiah, it was about reminding the Israelites of the laws given by God. It was the laws that made them a nation set apart. Is it the same for us? In which case, what are the laws we should follow?

Basics, 10 commandments. Can we remember them all?

Worship no other gods

Do not make images of anything in heaven or on earth to bow before

Do not misuse the name of God

Keep sabbath day holy

Honour mother and father

Do not murder

Do not commit adultery

Do not steal

Do not give false testimony about our neighbours

Do not covet your neighbours’ possessions

Do these commandments set us apart as a nation? Don’t non-Christians also adhere to these laws?

Although very few would often adhere to all of them. They are optional. Let alone the further laws given in Leviticus!

Keep sabbath day holy – how do we do that when shops and entertainment places are open? Not to mention when Jesus broke that law when healing on the sabbath, such as the man with a shriveled hand.

So, did Jesus and His teaching mean that these laws were no longer required?

Have they all been replaced by the new laws that He stated when declaring the new covenant? Jesus himself told us that is not the case. Matthew 5: 17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”.

We often think that the word fulfill means to bring to fruition, to an end. But the Greek translation and the context in which this is said does not give that meaning.

Every original command that God has given has love running through the midst of it. So when Jesus said “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” rather than contradicting the laws associated with Moses, compliments the whole reason of the law. The purpose of Jesus shows clearly that His thoughts and actions embodied the law in its every intent.

The overarching requirement remains - love. All the laws reflect love for people.

Love is a command, which means that we MUST carry it out – it is not optional.

Turn the other cheek – give a cloak to someone who has stolen your tunic– walk an extra mile. All these are actions to be taken when someone has hurt you – humiliated you – stolen from you. None of the scenarios that Jesus gave were easy. But that is what sets us apart as a nation for Jesus – reflecting the kingdom of God. None of these actions are any less or more than what God has done for each of us.

It does not mean that we promote a lawless society, or never seek justice when someone is hurt by others, but it does mean that we should never write anyone off as beyond help. Jesus never did. He would always give the option for anyone to follow Him. Not everyone chose to, and it will be the same today. But it is not for US to declare anyone beyond redemption, rather to continually offer the truth of Jesus so that they can make their own decision.

In the light of being a priesthood – as spoken about last week. What are our roles in this?

Body of Christ. We do not choose what part of the body we are but make the most of it – use any gifting we have to the full potential. No-one should despise anyone else because what they can or cannot do. Paul states that there are greater gifts, but it does not mean that the ***people*** who display these gifts are any greater than anyone else. Paul also states that ALL should desire the greater gifts. But a church needs all of them in different circumstances.

We all have a purpose. One thing that struck me when reading the Nehemiah passage was that Ezra, the teacher read the laws from on high. But the Levites that were standing in the crowd instructed the people as they were gathered.

That in my opinion is how church should work. Yes, there is one person who is held accountable to give clear instruction, but everyone has their opportunity to help others to understand things clearly on a grass root level.

That is where the body of Christ comes into action. Each person in this congregation needs help and assurance from each other. Do you agree?

So as we lift each other, we encourage each other to live out our lives in a way that sets us apart from the worldly desire to only keep optional laws, but strive to show love to everyone, even when for some looking on that would seem like madness, but we do it with the strength of the Holy Spirit, who is the only one that will truly understand, and the only one that counts.