

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** Nehemiah 2:11-18

**SERMON TITLE:** Why Build?

God's hand had been gracious to Nehemiah. He lived in Persia as part of the Jewish Diaspora. He was the cupbearer for the Persian king. And the day came when Nehemiah received a report about the condition of Jerusalem. The city wall had crumbled, its gates had been destroyed by fire, and the people left in Jerusalem were troubled and ashamed.

But God put into Nehemiah's heart a desire to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that God's people might flourish once again. Nehemiah prayed and then he asked the king for permission to travel to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. The king gave his consent and even facilitated the journey. Nehemiah, of course, gave all of this a theological interpretation. He said: *the gracious hand of my God was upon me*. That's why things happened to advance his cause.

Nehemiah then traveled to Jerusalem, he encountered opposition from some local leaders, he inspected the city in secret, and then he revealed his rebuilding plan to the people and they responded: *Let us start building!* The scriptures say that the people *committed themselves to the common good* and the wall was rebuilt.

Now First United Methodist Church, Pflugerville, is not in the same condition as was Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time. Thanks be to God! Even so, the echoes of Nehemiah's story help us to understand what we're about today; for you see, God's gracious hand has been upon this congregation for the past 25 years.

Did you know that in 1966, the Methodists in Pflugerville began their own sort of "exile" when the first Methodist congregation in Pflugerville disbanded after 43 years of existence? For 17 years there was no Methodist presence in this community. The original church building even burned to the ground. But then God's hand came upon a group of people who decided to form a new United Methodist Church in 1983.

Through the years and on several occasions, these pioneers said, *Let us start building!* So they gave of themselves to the common good with sacrificial gifts above and beyond their regular giving—and they built. Why? They built so that this congregation might flourish and extend the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ even further into this community. Those of us here now in 2008 enjoy the fruits of their sacrifices. That’s why we honor our past today.

And have you noticed? God’s hand is still upon this congregation. God has put into the hearts of our people a desire to renovate and build anew, so the cry is being heard again: *Let us start building!*

Why build? We build so that our congregation might flourish. We build to facilitate growth so that increasing numbers of children, youth and adults can come to know the love of God, and learn to live as followers of Jesus Christ within the fellowship of this church. Our vision is to utilize every square inch of the property that God has entrusted to us as a “base of operations” so that the disciples who are formed here can move out into the world as instruments of God’s transforming love in Jesus Christ. Our aim is to build our future!

Among those raising their voices and giving of themselves for common good are Sandy and George Tolleson. They are charter members of this congregation and George is a co-chair of our Building Committee. They come now to speak on in support of this effort.

What do you think? Is God’s hand upon us? Are we ready to build? Will we commit ourselves to the common good so that the job gets done? God awaits our response.

In the meantime, I invite you to join me in prayer each and every day as we undertake this exciting challenge together. At the end, I suspect that we will all stand in awe of what God’s gracious hand can do.