Church

Location

**Worship Celebration – Service of Consecration to the Lord’s Future**

*Setup: At front of sanctuary sits altar table. Sitting on and around altar is a pile of bricks, arranged to look like a wall that has crumbled and fallen over.*

**Call to Worship**

Leader: Let us worship the Lord!

*All: O Lord, open our lips, and together we will proclaim your praise.*

Blessed are you, God of compassion and mercy, to you be praise and glory forever.

*In the darkness of our sin, your light breaks forth like the dawn*

*and your healing springs up for deliverance.*

*As we rejoice in the gift of your saving help,*

*sustain us with your bountiful Spirit and open our lips to sing your praise.*

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*Blessed be God forever!*

**Opening Worship**

*Christians We Have Met to Worship/God Creator of Your People (CH#502, 585)*

*Shout to the North (M. Smith)*

**Introduction**

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 1:1-4 (read by \_\_\_\_\_\_)

**Reading** (read by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_): The story of Israel’s rebuilding begins with Nehemiah’s broken heart. The news of the sorry state of Jerusalem reached Nehemiah, and he wept. What had once been glorious, prosperous, and beautiful had become a ruin and a shame to the people there. When Nehemiah heard this, his heart was torn, and he mourned for his people and his country.

The story of rebuilding began with a moment of Truth: Israel was desolate, wearing her shame like a garment. “Great trouble and disgrace” were the words used to describe her. The nation had been destroyed in battle, and left to slowly decay at the hands of time and nature.

This was the Veritas moment: dreams of former glory and memories of a joyous past gave way to the stark reality that all Israel was devastated, and had no hope for a bright future.

“The wall is broken down.” Her protection, her border, her very definition, her status was nothing more than a pile of rubble. “Its gates have been burned with fire.” The doorway to commerce, her most public place, her strength and defense was lying in ashes and rubble.

And so Nehemiah wept. And so Nehemiah prayed to the God of Heaven.

Nehemiah’s heart was broken. This message from home brought tears to his eyes and pain to his soul. He heard the news, and it tore him apart.

Yet Nehemiah didn’t throw up his hands in despair. Instead, he prayed. He took his sorrow, his broken heart to the God of Heaven, and there he waited. In his pain, he turned to God. And so shall we.

**Short Pastoral Talk:** Recognizing our Situation

**Song:** *Cornerstone (C. Boydston)*

**Confession**

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 1:4-10 (read by \_\_\_\_\_)

**Short Pastoral talk:** The importance of confessing personal and corporate sin

**Corporate Confession:** (read by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ )

Lord God, ruler of heaven and earth, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

*Hear our Prayer*

We confess to you, Lord, that we are not who we should be. We do not live up to your standards. We like to pretend we have our lives together, that we are obedient to your desires, that we are holy and good and Christ-like. But we are sinful, and we are selfish.

*Hear our Prayer*

Lord, for the times we have been angry, the times we have spoken sharp words toward others, when we have hurt those around us,

*Forgive us, Lord.*

For the times we have made our own preferences and desires the standard for worship, instead of giving you the glory due only to you,

*Forgive us, Lord.*

For the times we have chosen to remain silent, to avoid sharing your love; when we have ignored sin in our midst because it was easier to keep silent,

*Forgive us, Lord.*

For the times we have held too tightly to our possessions, when we have been close-fisted with our finances, when we have spent money on ourselves while our fellow humanity is hungry, thirsty, and desperate; for the times we have bought ourselves new toys even while your house was falling into ruin,

*Forgive us, Lord.*

We receive your love, Lord, but we are not always loving toward those around us. When we have judged another, looked with suspicion upon another, laughed at the expense of another, when we have allowed prejudice to color our love for another,

*Forgive us, Lord.*

Lord, for the sins of those who have gone before, many who are no longer here, and yet their sinful actions color our story even today – for the sins of our past,

*Let there be forgiveness, Lord.*

For all sins great and small – the pride of eyes, the lust of the flesh, the impurity in our hearts, our stubbornness in thinking we can survive without you, our doubt and fear, the false gods we worship – gods like money and comfort and pride and prestige and popularity; for our false sense of self-sufficiency, the way we battle over personal preferences, the way we look with suspicion at one another, for the many ways we have doubted and failed you,

*We are ashamed and guilty, Lord. Forgive us. Forgive us. Please, forgive us.*

And yet we know you love us, Lord. And we know your promise, that if we confess our sins, you are faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We receive your mercy, love, and grace for the wonderful gifts they are. Help us, Lord, for without you, we can do nothing.

*Help us to walk in forgiveness, and to live lives that are pleasing to you. Thank you for your mercy. Amen.*

**Song:** *Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*

**Assessment**

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 2:11-16 (read by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ )

**Reading** (read by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_): Nehemiah took time to assess the situation. He walked around the city, noting the destruction, the devastation, the disaster that was left behind after war and nature had their way.

It was quiet work, it was solitary work. He didn’t commission blue-ribbon panels, he didn’t hire experts. He simply walked, and paid attention.

The wall was torn down. Rubble was piled high. The pathways were crowded with waste. But still he wandered; still, he paid attention.

This was hard work, looking at the ruins that had once been his beloved city. Many prefer to live in their memories and ignore the reality around them. Many would prefer a fantasy world in which all is still well. Many would say “It’s not really that bad.” But Nehemiah chose the better path: he wandered the ruins, noticed all that was broken; yet within that brokenness, he saw the building blocks of a new beginning.

For the last year or more, our church has been doing the work of assessing. We’ve looked at ourselves, and our community. We’ve remembered our past – the good moments and the painful moments. We’ve explored how we relate to each other. We’ve prayed, we’ve prayed, and we’ve prayed some more.

There’s more assessing to be done, and some of it is painful. Old visions are dying. Our building is aging. Our budget is suffering. Some of our people are aging and weakening. Our friends are leaving.

But this is necessary work, to assess, to think, to pay attention. Because, as Jesus said, if you know the truth, “the truth will set you free.” This is our work – to pay attention. And even as we open our eyes to the reality in which we find ourselves, we will find there the building blocks of the future God is preparing for us. Jesse may be a stump, but a new branch is growing. We may have the taste of ashes in our mouth, but out of those ashes will rise a glorious new day of health and vitality. Let us, then, pay attention.

**Short Pastoral Talk:** The ongoing work of assessment

**Song:** *I Must Tell Jesus (CH#462)*

**Consecration**

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 2:17-18 (by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ )

**Short Pastoral Talk:** Consecrating ourselves TO God, to BE his people, FOR the future into which God is leading us

**Corporate Consecration** (led by Church Chair): Having seen the destruction, yet finding hope in God, Nehemiah challenged the people of Israel: “Let us rebuild the wall, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” And the people responded: “Yes, let us start rebuilding,” and they began this good work.

This is, indeed, a good work. This is the work of God.

God called the people to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land, and they obeyed. Nehemiah challenged the people to rebuild, and they got to work. Jesus said to his disciples, “Follow me,” and they followed him.

Today, we believe that God is calling us into a new future. We rejoice for his faithfulness over our 90-year history, but we recognize that there is much work yet to be done. God is calling us to become a healthy missional church; God is calling us to the work of vitality, God is calling us to follow him as he leads us into our future together.

Today we consecrate ourselves to this: We consecrate ourselves to God, to be God’s people, that we are prepared for the work to which he calls us.

We consecrate ourselves to God:

*Almighty God, we don’t know the future. We don’t know what lies ahead in this journey. But we are your people, and you have called us to walk with you. With your help, we will serve you faithfully. Instead of falling into hopelessness, we will trust you, and we will do our best to obey you. God, you are our God, the only God, the one who holds our future. As Israel committed themselves to following you, as your disciples dropped everything to follow Jesus, so we, too, commit this to you: we will follow as you lead. We consecrate ourselves to you.*

We consecrate ourselves to be God’s people:

*We consecrate ourselves to love one another, to treat each other with respect, to listen and believe the best in each other. We consecrate ourselves to care about those whom God loves: truly all people, but especially the broken, the hurting, the poor, the outcast, and the hungry. We consecrate ourselves to the ongoing work of God: to spread the Gospel everywhere, to worship him in spirit and in truth, to be a people of prayer, to study his Word, to being good stewards of all that he gives us.*

We consecrate ourselves to the future God is preparing for us:

*Come what may, we will follow God on this journey. We don’t know where God will lead, what enemies we will face, what trials may come, what things we may need to let go of, what new challenges we will encounter; we don’t know what will change and what will stay the same. As God leads, however, we will accept whatever comes as we passionately pursue future glory. We believe that God will bless the work of our hands, we trust that this place will be filled with songs of praise, and that lost sheep will find their way home. We believe God will provide all that we need. We gladly lay aside our own visions and dreams for the dreams God has for us. We consecrate ourselves to his dream for us, that his Kingdom will come here in our midst, even as it is in heaven.*

**Brick-laying:** *Let Your Glory Fall (D. Ruis)*

*As a tangible expression of their commitment, congregants are invited to come forward and pick up a brick from the pile of rubble, carrying it to a side table where they place it to form a new wall. The cornerstones of this wall are four large rocks used as the foundation of an altar created when we consecrated our relational covenant 8 months prior.*

**Prayer of Consecration** (Pastor)

**Closing Song:** *Our God (C. Tomlin)*

**Pronouncement and Benediction** (Pastor)