

Messy Church – January 2021

Nehemiah

The activities are:

1. Cupbearer to an emperor
Nehemiah chapters 1 and 2

Make a cup
2. Travelling
Nehemiah chapters 1 and 2

Journey – with an armed escort and building materials – make a cart?
3. Walls – rebuilding Jerusalem
Nehemiah chapters 3 and 4, verses 16 to 18
 - a. Ice cream wafers
 - b. Jenga
4. Swords and trowels
Nehemiah chapter 4, verses 16 to 18

Doing different things with each hand
5. Ezra reading the scroll of the law
Nehemiah chapter 8

Reading aloud

Stories and Activities

1 Nehemiah the cupbearer

You will need: a yogurt or cream pot, tin foil or foil wrapping paper, plastic jewels (optional)

Screw the foil up to give it crinkles, and then open it out again – don't make it too smooth, as that takes away the purpose of the screwing up! Wrap the foil around the pot you are using, folding some under the base (don't make it so thick the pot won't stand up) and tuck the excess in over the top, so all the outside of the pot is covered. If you want, stick jewels on the cup.

Nehemiah was the Emperor Artaxerxes' cupbearer, or the wine steward. This meant that he served the Emperor's wine. He may also have been responsible for tasting it, to make sure it wasn't poisoned. This position was very important. The cupbearer was a person who was physically close to the Emperor – he had to be, to keep the cup filled. He would therefore know all sorts of things about the Emperor and the business of the Empire – because he would hear what was going on.

Nehemiah was a servant, a very important servant. He could tell the Emperor things he might not otherwise have known. And this is also how he managed to get permission to go to Jerusalem, with building materials and some soldiers for protection on the way.

Talk about: jobs that might not seem important, but give the opportunity to achieve great things.

2 Travelling – from Susa to Jerusalem

You will need: an atlas if you want to look at the journey (or see the map), and for the cart you will need a box, some stiff card or a round cheese box if your box is small, garden canes or bamboos for axle and shaft, paint, glue, scissors, pictures (on the website or included with the email).

Cut one side out of the box (so there is no back in the cart), and make 3 holes just above the bottom of the box – one on each side for the axle, and one in the centre of the front for the shaft. For the wheels, either cut two circles out of stiff card, or the top and bottom out of a cheese box. Make holes in the middle of each circle. Put one cane through the box, with a wheel on each side. Fasten the other piece of cane into the hole at the front of the cart, with just enough of the cane inside to fix it. The animals pulling the cart would be fastened one each side of this shaft.

Talk about: how difficult it might be to get heavy or large things over long distances when you only have carts pulled by oxen or donkeys. Think about how long it might take, and how often the animals would need to rest.

How exciting is it to travel? Where would you like to go?

3 Walls – rebuilding Jerusalem

a. Ice cream wafer walls

You will need: Ice cream wafers, tubes of icing.

Stick the wafers together with the squirty icing. You will need to make corners – the wall went all round Jerusalem – and your wall will be more stable with corners in.

b. Jenga

You will need: a Jenga set

If you want, you can simply play the game – follow the rules on the packet. See how tall the tower can get before it falls down. (You can count the layers, or use a tape measure. Otherwise, you can use the blocks to build a wall.

In the time of Nehemiah, important cities had walls around them, to enable the people who lived there to defend themselves when enemies came. Nehemiah's family had lived in Jerusalem, and when it was captured by the Babylonians, the walls were broken down, to stop the local people from rebelling. Now the Babylonians were not in charge any more, Nehemiah wanted to rebuild the walls, so that the city would be restored.

Talk about: People today who might want to rebuild their homes after war, or natural disaster. Think about places that might not be a good place to rebuild.

4 Swords and trowels

You will need: a piece of paper and something to write with, or paint and a paintbrush

Try writing or painting with one hand, while the other hand pats your head or strokes the cat. If you have some loose bricks, or stones in your garden, try lifting them one handed while the other hand is in your pocket, or holding something else.

If you have a Jenga set, you could try building it one handed.

As the people of Jerusalem rebuilt the walls of the city, they were under threat from the local authorities of the province. They had written to the Emperor to try to get the building stopped, and while they waited for a reply, they threatened the people of the city. Nehemiah split the workforce in half so that half were ready to fight, while half did the building, but even those doing the building had to keep an eye out for danger, and build with one hand while holding a weapon in the other hand. It is hard enough to build a wall, without being restricted to using only one hand.

Talk about: what it might be like to only have one hand that works properly, because of illness or accident. Think about how much harder that might be when everyone else has two hands and makes no allowance for you.

Think about what it might be like to live always checking for danger – how often do we check for danger? Make a list of those times.

5. Reading aloud

You will need: someone who is better at reading than you are, and something to read. If you have a bible, you could ask your reader to read some of the stories we have used today from the bible.

Sit and listen to the reading.

When Ezra the priest read the book of the Law to the Jews who had come to Jerusalem, he read “from dawn until noon, and they all listened attentively.” Further on, it says they all stood and listened. It was a long time to stand and listen in a big open space, crowded with people. When Ezra had finished reading, other people helped explain what it meant. This means that it was hard to understand. I wonder how many people really understood what the Law said?

Talk about: being read to. Do you like to be read to, or do you prefer to read it for yourself?

If someone reads to you for 3 hours, do you listen hard all the time, or does your mind wander? How difficult is it to concentrate for a long time?

Celebration

Song One more step

<https://youtu.be/7PXV3dwaeNU>

Celebration Story

Nehemiah was the cup bearer to the king. This was an important job as he could see the king regularly and might even get the chance to talk to him, if the king allowed it. He was part of the Jewish community that were exiles in Persia. He had a brother who had gone back to Jerusalem, and now had returned to Susa with some friends. The friends told Nehemiah that Jerusalem was in a terrible state. While the Jews had been exiled other people lived in the area, and they didn't want the Jews to return. The walls protecting Jerusalem were ruined and the gates destroyed. This made Nehemiah very unhappy.

He still had to do his job, however. He took wine into the king. The king, Artaxerxes, noticed that Nehemiah looked sad, and asked him why. Nehemiah realised that this was a great opportunity, and, giving a quick prayer to God, told the king what the problem was and asked if he could go to Jerusalem to help build it again.

The king agreed to let him go, and also to give him letters to the governor of the area to show that he had authority to build, and to use wood from the king's forest for the gates. He also gave him an army escort to go with him.

When Nehemiah got to Jerusalem, the first thing he did was inspect the walls. When he had done this he spoke to the priests and the people to encourage them to rebuild. They agreed, and a plan was set out for the work, which involved various groups building different sections of the walls.

At first the other people, who didn't want the walls rebuilt, laughed at the Jews and joked about what they were doing. When they saw that this didn't stop them they threatened to tell the king that Nehemiah was starting a revolt. When this didn't work, they plotted to attack the people who were building.

So Nehemiah had to use some of the people as guards, and everyone building had to build with one hand so they could hold a weapon in the other.

Nehemiah had to deal with many problems. Some of the richer people took advantage of the poorer ones who were building and couldn't do their normal work. Nehemiah stopped this, and he shared his food with others, and didn't demand the payments that previous governors had required.

Eventually everything was rebuilt. Nehemiah asked Ezra, the priest, to read the Books of the Law to the people, and had them explained. The people realised they had not been following God's laws and promised to do better in the future.

This is how the Jews had a new beginning in the land of Judah. This all happened about 400 years before Jesus was born, but was a big part in establishing what the country was like when he came. Many other things did happen, including the area being conquered by Alexander the Great, and there were some more wars and rebellions, which are another story, but this set the shape of the land and re-established Judea, Jerusalem and the temple.

Song Be bold, be strong

<https://youtu.be/OdQYmGTsKmE>

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that each new year is a new start. This year hasn't started well, so help us deal with the bad things and make the most of the good things. Give us strength to get through these difficult times, and to keep helping each other.

Amen

Enjoy our celebration on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube channel at

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw

Then have tea or a treat if it isn't tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (if you want to send pictures that you don't want shared, just tell me. I'll only share the one's you're happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team

Last month we managed the YouTube, and I hope you enjoyed it. We also managed Zoom for talk back to us. Our end of Zoom will be what is going on YouTube, but we won't put pictures from your end on. Contact me if you want the link for Zoom. Look out for the broadcast on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube Channel. We live stream at 4pm, but it then stays up as a recording. Like last time we will mix activities into the story.