



# GPS GUIDE: SEPTEMBER 19, 2021

## Grow. Pray. Study

**Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Sermon: Renew Our Community**

### **Acts 2:43-47**

A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

### **Monday: Read Nehemiah 3:1-5; 6:15-16** **COMMUNITY BUILDS.**

Chapter 3 is one of those odd passages filled with names we cannot pronounce. If you read beyond verse 5 you discover that the whole chapter chronicles by name and location, the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Why do we need to know this? What possible significance can be found here? The word "build" is central to the book of Nehemiah. Most people with a basic knowledge of the Bible can tell you Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. But Nehemiah did much more than simply fortify the walls surrounding the city. He recognized that more than the city needed to be rebuilt, the community of Israel needed to be rebuilt. The crumbling walls reflected the spiritual health of the people of Jerusalem. Nehemiah, distressed by the condition of his community and his people, calls them to rebuild the wall, reminding them of the God who is always with them, and in the process of rebuilding the wall the people of Israel remembered. More than the wall around Jerusalem was rebuilt with each repair. Because each family, each person rebuilt their part, they accomplished the impossible. A reminder that we can always accomplish more together than we will ever achieve on our own. How have you experienced God magnifying the work of our community? What will you do to "build" ministry where you are?

*Prayer: God of All, take our offerings—the work we do, the lives we live—and use them to build your kingdom here on earth. Amen.*

**Tuesday: Read Numbers 11:16-18**  
**COMMUNITY STRENGTHENS.**

Moses is in the middle and he has had enough of being in the middle between the people of Israel and God. He is overwhelmed, so much so that he asks God for help... or death. The pressure is too much. The task is too huge. He wants out. He can't ever be enough – he didn't want the job in the first place. Moses is done. Can you relate to Moses' disappointment and distress? In that moment of Moses' despair, God invites Moses to share his load with others. Choose people, God says, to surround you, to stand with you, to carry the burden so you won't bear it alone. Imagine what might have happened if Moses tried to continue the work alone. How important is community when you are overwhelmed, discouraged, or defeated? What are some ways we can strengthen our own community so that we are better able to be the people of God?

*Prayer: Listening God, may we be a community that shares all of life, knowing that we are not alone. Amen.*

**Wednesday: Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13**  
**COMMUNITY LOVES.**

The Corinthian issue is a divisive community. We are no strangers to the kind of division in communities of which Paul speaks — racial, denominational, and political. And our strategies for negotiating these divisions leave much to be desired. It often comes down to choosing sides, as if the spectrum between the two poles did not exist. It would be better if we *only* chose sides. Instead, we choose which side we are on and then, to make ourselves feel better or justified about our decision, we proceed to suspect, demonize, and tear down the other side. But as Elias Chacour says, "The one who is wrong is the one who says 'I am right.'" We are also no strangers to the kind of division that the gospel provokes. And sometimes we forget just how divisive the gospel can be. Choosing regard over rejection, respect over diminution, love over hate, peace over conflict is not as easy as we hope it could be, as we wish it would be. It seems like it should be easy — and that's the problem. Why is it that we find it so difficult to make what appears to be a rather obvious choice? A choice for love? What stands in our way? What is at stake for us that we are reluctant to admit or to say out loud? How will we choose love today?

*Prayer: Holy One, help us not to erase, pretend conflict doesn't exist, or think our division will eventually go away, but to embrace more fully how to live into it, among it, and with it in love — because God is love. Amen.*

**Thursday: Read Hebrews 10:24-25**  
**COMMUNITY ENCOURAGES.**

Bill Cavanaugh says, "being against organized religion is like being against organized hospitals. Institutions will always be subject to corruption and silliness, fraud and ineptitude, since they are comprised of people who . . . well, since they are comprised of people." But the organized, institutional part of religion – the

messy materiality of people and practices – is its beating heart, the church. It's a way of seeing all things in relation to God; a way of receiving, offering, loving, and living one's life as sheer gift. The book of Hebrews draws us into all the potential messiness of corporate religion: worship and prayer, gifts and offerings, cries, sighs, and tears. But Hebrews also reminds us of the power of community to shape us all into more faithful people, we are admonished to "provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together." And that's the inconvenient and beautiful thing about church: it asks you to do stuff – like worship with other people, love other people, do good to and for other people. Because we are better together. How has church "provoked" you to love and good deeds recently? In what specific ways does gathering as a church—meeting together—encourage you?

*Prayer: Gathering God, we give thanks for this church—your church—and all of the ways this community encourages and challenges us to be more faithful. Amen.*

**Friday: Read Psalm 133**  
**COMMUNITY ENJOYS LIFE.**

In the words of the Psalmist, we are reminded of the joy of living lives which are found to be at peace with one another: the joy of sharing generously one another's existence as we were created to do. It is the joy and peace which God longs for us in our relationships with one another; it is why Jesus came and lived and died and rose again that we might have peace with one another and with God. Life in all its fullness is life with each other and God. Is this not a great vision of whom we are meant to be as a human race – people who live together in unity: in joy and peace with one another? The idea of Jesus' resurrection inspired the early Christian communities. It was a radically new way of viewing life and death and gave hope a new direction. Jesus' resurrection was an anomaly for the prevailing Hebrew thought and Greek philosophy. God was doing something new and different, and this gave people hope. It was these things that kept people in that early church and inspired them to share the good news – God's peace had been declared and a new hope, a new future was promised in Jesus Christ. So it was, that from that small band of followers, great proclamation and deeds flowed generously and graciously into the world; the church blossomed and grew from a handful of followers to be the dominant faith in the world. What brings you joy? How are you sharing the abundant life you have in Jesus? How is God inviting you to rediscover Christ's call on your life?

*Prayer: Lord, it is good and pleasing when we live together as one. Amen.*

**Saturday: Read Luke 10:1-9**  
**COMMUNITY EXPANDS.**

I've heard a lot of folks recently despair over the decline of the church and then go on to describe their own feelings of helplessness. "We're not big enough to make a difference..." or "We're not rich enough," or "we don't have the resources," or...well, you get the idea. Notice, however, that Jesus sends out 70 disciples. Not

700 or 7000, but 70. And think of what they accomplish! Not only in this story, but also and especially in the months and years ahead, as this is the group is the core of the disciples who, after Pentecost, will preach and teach the Gospel and take the good news to the ends of the earth. In later years their descendants will build hospitals and orphanages and refugee centers and all manner of institutions that profoundly touch the lives around them. Just 70 people in the beginning, and with faith and courage they changed the world. What would it take for us to live and serve and share as those early disciples? How is God inviting us to expand our own faith? ... our welcome? ... our ministry? ... our church?

*Prayer: Jesus, remind us of our calling to share the good news, to extend our arms in welcome, and expand the family of God. Amen.*



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