

## “Giving Thanks for the Hard Workers”

Nehemiah 3.1-16; 1 Corinthians 12.4-11

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Mason First Presbyterian Church

Mason, Michigan

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Usually it's the case that our liturgist reads the scripture passage. Peter worked on all those names from Nehemiah and then asked me this morning if he could be excused!

That passage from Nehemiah may be hard to read, but its meaning is clear. There was a time in the history of Jerusalem, about 500 years before Jesus, when they had to rebuild the wall and repair the various gates that allowed access into the city. There's a long story of *why* they had to rebuild the wall and repair the gates, which we'll talk about some other day. Simply put – there was a job that needed to be done, and there were people willing to do the work. Somebody felt that this was a significant enough matter that the names of many of those individuals should be recorded for posterity.

So there was Zaccur, and Meremoth, and Meshullam, and Zadok, and Melatiah, and Jadon, and Uzziel, and Hananiah – just to name the first eight! – who rebuilt the wall. One was a goldsmith; another was a perfumer; there were several local governors – these were people who had other jobs, *paying* jobs, but these people *volunteered* their time to help with the project. There were a very large number of people working; Shallum's *daughters* even helped out. While those people rebuilt the wall, other repaired the gates. Eliashib repaired the Sheep Gate; the sons of Hassenaah repaired the Fish Gate; Hanun worked on the Valley Gate; and so on. There was a gate called the Dung Gate – that was the gate through which the city's waste water went out – and a guy named Malchijah repaired that one. A dirty job, but *somebody* had to do it! Person after person, brick after brick, day after day, until the job was done. Somebody wrote all those names down, and then for the next *two thousand years*, until the invention of the printing press, scribes had to copy all those names *by hand*. This was important work! Why write all those names down? Why go to that much effort? Because there are times when it's appropriate to publicly *acknowledge* people, *thanking* them for their hard, faithful work.

There are a number of people in the life of this church who never really get *thanked* for their hard, faithful work. They put in a *lot* of time and effort, with very little recognition. We take time every spring to give thanks for all our musicians, who enrich our worship services, and we give thanks for all our teachers, who help people grow in their faith, but there are many other tasks that *need to be done* around here, and we rarely – if ever – thank these people. We're going to rectify that today.

Before I begin, I should say that I may have missed somebody. Several people helped create this

list, and we've tried our best to include everybody, but we're not perfect. There's always a risk of leaving somebody out, but I think it's important that we go to the effort. *Your work matters!*

Let me start with the kitchen angels, who fix food for us to enjoy most every Wednesday evening throughout the school year. It used to be the case that Joyce Yeutter would make sure these people got properly thanked at the end of each year, but since her passing I'm not sure we've done as good a job at that. So we need to thank Gladys Welker, Jenny Bond, Linda Boster, Anne Fett, Mary Lou French, Barb Gibson, Rex Hauser, and Anna Lee Lavis. We need to thank Ted and Marge Welch, who delivers meals on Wednesday evenings to a number of our homebound members. And we need to thank the crew who cleans up and washes the dishes after the meal, which typically includes Vern Schrock, Anne Fett, Bill and Bonnie Friend, Mary Garland Jackson, and Carol and Roger Shiery.

Every Monday, Sue Caltrider spends an hour or two helping Sheren count and record the offering money before Sheren takes it to the bank. Bonnie Friend substitutes when Sue is not available.

That worship bulletin you're using this morning – those have to get folded by hand; this past year, Shirley and Jim Day, Mary Lou French, and Sue Riley have been our folders.

Ever wonder what happens to the fellowship pad sheets that you fill out every Sunday? Sue Riley takes all that info and enters it into Sheren's database periodically.

When we have communion, the bread and the juice doesn't just magically appear; Debbie Shellenbarger, Doreen Chapman, Sandy Diehl, and Mary Ozee make sure that we have what we need.

You can hear what is said in worship thanks to our sound board operators: Walt Fry, Frank Boster, Barry Chapman, Jim Stewart, and Marty Subject.

A large number of people serve as ushers. Sheren gave me a list with about 65 names on it from just the past year! We also have about 20 people who have served as a liturgist, and another dozen or so who have offered children's sermons. I am not going to read all those names – but consider yourself thanked! Special thanks also to Mary Robinson, who finds ushers, liturgists, and communion servers for us, week in and week out; and Mary Garland Jackson, who coordinates the children's sermons.

There are a few people who are here on Sunday mornings only because someone else has brought them; our recent drivers have included Frank Boster, Jim Day, Rex Hauser, and Steve Van Dyke.

Wednesdays at noon, we have a prayer service, open to anybody who wants to come. This past year, those services have been led by Sandy Diehl, Frank Boster, Lana Dart, Shirley Day, and Debbie Shellenbarger, with live music once a month courtesy of Donna Archer. After the service we offer a light lunch, thanks to Sandy Diehl, Issie Nielson, Kathy Oesterle, Debbie Shellenbarger, and Gladys Welker.

Whenever Sheren gives a big stack of checks to sign to our Treasurer, Vern Schrock, or our Assistant Treasurers Sue Riley or Jamie Robinson; Jim Day also used to help with that effort.

Lana Dart is our Accounts Administrator, who files *lots* of financial paperwork and helps Sheren

with finance-related tasks from time to time. Ginnie Gibson, Lana Dart, Karen O'Malley, and Chuck Shaub recently conducted a very thorough review of our finances and financial procedures.

We have a number of youth who provided significant help at Vacation Bible School this past summer, including Autumn, Cody, and Kayleigh Cameron, Logan Carr, Adam and Aimee Cruickshank, Colin Pinches, Abby and Anna Seely, and Nick and Samantha Trout. This year, in addition to the regular adult teaching staff, special acting assistance was provided by Barb and Steve Van Dyke.

Once a month, Betty and Duane Baker, Marge and Ted Welch, and Kathleen and Dale Miillhbach fold, stuff, and label the newsletters. Did you know they have to sort all the out-of-town ones by zip code before the post office will accept them?

A few people offer maintenance and cleaning services – building things, fixing electrical issues, painting, and scrubbing: Barry Chapman, Linda Boster, Bill and Bonnie Friend, Walt Fry, and Ray Strayer.

Greg Lang is our master landscaper, with some support from Debbie Shellenbarger.

There is one person who really understands how *every* mechanical system works around here, who has spent many hours this year regulate the temperature in all the various rooms, and who locks and unlocks the building every Sunday, and that's Travis Archer.

One of our homebound members, Carole Richards, coordinates our prayer chain. Some of you who are new to the church may not know about this – if you need people to pray about something, you can call Carole, or call the office and ask Sheren to let Carole know. Carole then sends out a message to thirty-five members and friends of this church, who will pray for you. Again, I'm not going to read all those names, but if you're on the prayer chain, know that your prayers are valued and appreciated.

We have a knitting group that makes prayer shawls to give to people who are in special need, and other gifts for special occasions; that group includes Mary Schrock, Diane Devoe, Barb Komejan, Maggie Knust, Peg Shaub, Carol Shiery, Suzie Threadgould, and Mary Torrey.

For the last several years we have had a church softball team, thanks to the leadership of coach Jay Harkness. We made it to the postseason for the first time this year!

Then there is the whole committee structure. We have the Session (the governing board of the church), the Board of Deacons, and a whole bunch of committees: Administration, Finance, Mission, Parish Life, Personnel, Spiritual Growth, and Worship and Music, plus the Adult Spiritual Growth Team, Capital Campaign Team, the Liturgical Arts Subcommittee, the Membership and Outreach Subcommittee, the Memorial Committee, the Natural Church Development Team, and the Nominating Committee. These people do a *ton* of work and keep *all sorts of things* running smoothly around here. Collectively, these boards, committees, and teams include: Donna Archer, Travis Archer, Sue Blonshine, Jenny Bond, Frank and Linda Boster, Merrilee Brockman, Bruce Caltrider, Barry and Doreen Chapman, Lana Dart, Lucinda Davenport, Sandy Diehl, Sarah Fay-Simons, Lloyd Fett, Bob Filka, Mary Lou French, Bill and Bonnie Friend, Barb Gibson, Ginnie Gibson, Jay and Loren Harkness, Rex Hauser and Mary Garland Jackson, Shirley Kline, Maggie Knust, Anna Lee Lavis, Debbie Markiewicz, Laurie McGonigal,

Linda Myall, Mari Nicol, Kathy Oesterle, Mary Ozee, Linda Peterson, Carma Philip, Peter Robinson, Tom and Tonya Seely, Vern Schrock, Steve Sowles, Marla St. George, Camille Subject, Suzie Threadgould, Kelly Trout, Barb and Steve Van Dyke, and Gladys Welker; plus staff members Lori Filka, Michelle Mackey, Deb Melse, Darlene Ross, John Sklar, and Sheren Wright. Whew – that’s a lot!

Our Women’s Association has as its officers Gladys Welker, Linda Boster, and Barb Tornholm. Mary Lou French, Barb Gibson, Carma Philip, Sue Riley, Ruth Sablich, and Gladys Welker play Bingo with the residents at Dobie Road. Linda Boster, Becky Cornish, Bill Friend, Mary Lou French, Dale and Kathleen Miihlbach, and Ted and Marge Welch help with the rummage sale. And a whole bunch of you help out with our funeral dinners – which is *immensely* appreciated by every grieving family we serve.

Our Men’s Fellowship, under the leadership of Peter Robinson, prepares and delivers our annual Sweetheart Luncheon every February, for the lovely young women of our community 65 and over. Then Men’s Fellowship hasn’t had as many meetings as usual this year because Peter has been swamped, faithfully tending to the details of our loan with the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program.

Last night I remembered that there were several people who prepared food for our Explorers Classes for prospective new members, and a variety of people who hosted our recent stewardship discussions at their homes. I don’t have all those names in front of me – but thank you!

Our church has to send a representative to the meetings of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan, our regional judicatory; this year, Frank Boster and Lana Dart have been taking turns doing that job.

And finally, our Clerk of Session, Bruce Archer. In addition to taking the minutes of our Session and Congregational meetings, Bruce also maintains our church operations manual, submits reports to presbytery, signs documents on behalf of the church, and keeps all sorts of records. Bruce has created a massive database that includes birth, baptism, ordination, and death records of *every member of this church* from its founding in 1859 to the present – a labor of love, and a treasure trove of information!

I *think* that’s most everybody at the present time, other than our gifted musicians and dedicated teachers, whom we thank in the spring. If I didn’t mention your name and I should have – my hearty apologies. Let me know, please. And if you’re sitting out there thinking, “I’d like to get involved; what can I do to help?” – take heart, we can find something for you to do! God has given every single one of us special gifts, talents, and interests, and we can find a job perfectly suited for you. Just come up to me or any of our staff members or lay leaders – we would love to have you join the ministry of this church!

Thinking about all these names makes me want to look at that Nehemiah passage again. A *lot* of people rebuilt the walls and repaired the gates for Jerusalem. And there are a *lot* of people I just mentioned. I wonder which list is longer. Are there *more* people doing volunteer ministry in this congregation, than in the *whole city of Jerusalem* did back then? I don’t know. Go count the names!

To all of you who faithfully give of yourself week after week, year after year – *thank you*. From my heart, from *all* of our hearts, from the very heart of God, *thank you*, very much. We appreciate you!

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