

Connected

Speaker: Ben Whitnall

Date: 19th February 2023

Talk title: Nehemiah - Contamination

Bible verses: Nehemiah 13, 2 Corinthians 5.14-21

What are the main points?

- As we see in the story of Nehemiah 13, **it's easy to be diverted by our surroundings** from God-honouring to non-honouring behaviour
- Surroundings change, so understanding **what God-honouring looks like where we are requires continual attentiveness** (cf 1 Sam 15.22; Hosea 6.6; every interaction between Jesus and outraged/shocked onlookers – healing on the Sabbath, praising the woman who 'wastes' the jar of perfume, Peter wanting to set up tents at the Transfiguration etc etc)
- A surrounding for us in Ebe today to beware of, in Ben's opinion, is **capitulating to culture wars/participating in insider-v-outsider tribalism – because this kind of divisive power play is, he argues, anathema to the radically loving character of God and the ministry of reconciliation with which we have been entrusted**

Questions to prompt conversation...

- What was your initial reaction to the passage (Nehemiah's list of people's 'bad behaviours' and his responses to them)?
- Ben talked about how we unavoidably have to make interpretive decisions when responding to this (or any) passage in the Bible (is this about specifically Tobiah and Sanballat or the idea of Sabbath day trading or a broad general principle or something else?) What was your gut instinct to go for?
- What was on your list of 'things I think are wrong with the world today'/ways we 'stray further from God's light every day'?
- Ben said one of the dangers he felt most confident about for us was capitulating to culture wars/participating in insider-v-outsider tribalism – because this kind of divisive power play is, he argues, anathema to the radically loving character of God and the ministry of reconciliation with which we have been entrusted.
- Do you agree that this is a trend that exists in the world? Why/why not?
- Do you agree that this is not honouring to the character of God/the ministry of reconciliation? Why/why not?
- We all drift into making 'insider groups' that are comfortable/familiar to ourselves all the time. Which insider groups can you see that you are/have been in? (Hint: church/religious-v-non-religious is a REALLY common one) What are some of the lines you've drawn up to create insider-outsider divides?
- Who, then, are 'disempowered outsiders' to you? Which groups or types or people is it your instinct to cast off as different and dangerous? What might it look like to actively seek empowering reconciliation with them?