

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, September 12, 2023
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“We Don’t Want You Here!”

READING: Nehemiah 4:1-5 – When Sanballat hear that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, “What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?” Tobiah, the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What they are building – if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!” Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on the own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.”

One morning last week as I was drinking my first coffee, I stepped into the dining room to look out the window there, and I saw movement on the ground just below the window. I stepped forward slowly until I could plainly see a new visitor to our humble abode: a young, fat woodchuck preening himself. He didn’t notice me in the house above and behind him. I watched him for a few moments, then I tapped on the window. Quick as a wink he ran under out front stoop. “Great,” I thought, “another unwanted guest.”

Over this past spring and summer I think I have told you about the rabbits who wanted to eat all of my Asian lilies, the deer who ate my day lilies, pepper plants, and sunflowers, the racoons who made their home in my attic, and the young skunk who drowned in our pool. Now there’s a woodchuck thinking about setting up shop under my front entrance. What’s next? A bear sleeping on our deck?

Now I know why I am seeing so much wildlife around the place: they’re all refugees. In this past year alone developers have taken down at least 10 or 15 acres of woodland and field within half a mile of our home. They’ve built homes, patio homes, apartment buildings, and offices. The poor critters have been pushed out of their own places and are looking to move in with us. We say, “We don’t want you here!” We do everything we can to keep them out.

Thinking on that reminded me of the returnees from the Exile in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. For 70 years the cream of Judaism had been scattered throughout the Babylonian Empire. For 70 years Jerusalem had lain abandoned and decimated. A wasteland where jackals and foxes raised their kits. The neighboring nations of Edom, Samaria, and Moab had rejoiced in the defeat and destruction of their ancient enemies the Jews. They took over their abandoned fields and their trade routes. Things were good.

Then Babylon fell. The Persians gained supremacy and their king, Cyrus, had decreed that any Jew wanting to return to Jerusalem and Judea was free to do so. Ezra had led hundreds of refugees back. Nehemiah was given the task of seeing to the restoration of the city’s walls and the Temple itself. The people worked with all their hearts. The walls began to rise...and the neighbors were incensed! They were fearful that with the walls rebuilt and the Temple reestablished, Judea might once again make itself felt in the region. At first they only hurled insults at the Jews. Later it was arrows and spears that flew at those trying to regain the life their parents and grandparents had known in Jerusalem. The neighbors said in numerous ways, “We don’t want you here!”

For many of us of German extraction we know that in many places our forebearers were not welcomed. They were immigrants. They spoke a language other than English. They ate “funny” foods and played “weird” music. They were clannish and clung to the customs and folkways of the “Old Country”. In many

places, including Louisville, their were anti-German riots and persecutions, especially during the World Wars. The same was true for the Italian immigrants, the Irish immigrants, and other people-groups who came to American to find a new life. Those who were already here (all of them from immigrant stock) said, "We don't want you here!"

For 10 and more years Mexican and South American immigrants have looked to America as a great hope. The poverty and the drug-culture of their homelands has driven them to great trials and great dangers in an effort to find a home where they can work, raise their children, and live in peace. Mostly America has said, "We don't want you here!" Yes, I agree, they should enter the country legally, but we make it so hard and allow so few that many in desperation do so illegally.

I've watched close-hand this summer as one of those apartment complexes has been going up near my home. The cement workers were all Latino. The carpenters were nearly all Latino. The roofers – all Latino. The masons – all Latino. The dry-wallers – all Latino. And those men worked in all conditions, six days a week, and did marvelous work. Many of them have families here. Some have families back in the Old Country. They're doing exactly what our forebearers did when they came to these shores: work, pray, love, and live. The woodchuck has to leave, but I think I should be more caring and welcoming of the others.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1) LOOKING AHEAD: September 24 – Elders BBQ

2) St. Paul Lutheran Church, Royal Oak, MI – 150th Anniversary Year. PK to preach there 9/25