

Does it ever feel to you like something isn't quite right?

It seems that one day Sherlock Holmes and his assistant, Watson, went camping. As the night wore on, Sherlock woke up, leaned over, and asked Watson, "What do you see?"

Watson responded, "Sherlock, I see the North Star, which has helped guide us to this spot. Beyond that I see the Big Dipper and the tail of Orion. I can also make out the edges of the Milky Way and know that there are universes expanding beyond that."

As Watson was about to continue his elaborate explanation, suddenly Sherlock elbowed him and hissed, "Watson, don't you see it? Someone has stolen our tent!"

Sherlock knew something wasn't quite right. Watson didn't quite get it. He just got caught up in the beauty of the night sky. Do you ever feel as if something isn't quite right? What do you do about it?

We live in a world where there are some things, just not right. There is a lot of pain. There is a lot of anguish. There is a lot of fear. There are a lot of people hurting. There are a lot of people who are on the outside, looking in. Some things are not right with our world. What can you do about it?

I am here today to say that I believe we, as the people of God, can begin to do something about all that is wrong in our world. *We can act as people of faith, and we can use our influence to make a difference.*

In our scripture for today the exiles have returned from foreign lands. Nehemiah is trying to help rebuild Jerusalem and the wall around Jerusalem. He has asked people to help rebuild the wall,

using what they have, doing what they can, to make the wall safe, so Jerusalem will be safe.

He has no money to give them. He is just asking everyone to give what they can and do what they can. And they respond positively.

But a crisis arises. People are discovering that they are in the midst of some economic challenges. Some are losing property. Some are having children sold into slavery. The people doing the work are feeling pressured and challenged.

To make matters even worse, they are losing their families and their land, not to foreigners, but to family members and other members of the Jewish community. Even though these practices were technically not against the law of the land, Nehemiah saw this practice as unjust. Nehemiah thought this isn't right. In his mind, this kind of taking advantage of people was wrong. And he became angry.

What did he do? ***He used his influence to make a difference and deal with the situation. He did what I believe God calls you and me to do when we see something wrong in our world. We are called to use our influence to make a difference, to make the world a better place for the good of all.***

Nehemiah called the leaders together. He said, "Look this is wrong. You are treating each other as if some are less important than you are. Don't you want to live for God? If you do, then care deeply about each other. If you want to live for God, care deeply about the world and our community. What on earth, will people on the outside think of us, if we treat each other as dogs?"

His speech touched a chord within those who were listening. They cared about Nehemiah and what he thought. They had already

seen the good work he was going in their midst. They realized that he was asking them to do, what he was already doing. *Live for God. Work for the good of the entire community.*

Last week, Susan did a fabulous job of telling us about the many ministries of missions that are going on within our church. While we can and should feel good about that, we should never sit back and say, "Wow, we have arrived at a great place."

The reality is, while we are doing some great things, there are still people in our community who are hurting. There are still injustices happening in our world. What I want to know is, are you willing to follow the example of Nehemiah? Are you willing to live for God? Are you willing to work for the good of the entire community? Are you willing to be a positive influence in this world, to make a difference?

What I know is that when we commit to making a difference, God can and will work through us to change our world for the better.

Metropolitan Kyril was a church leader in Bulgaria during World War II. When the Nazi's came to round up the Jews in his city and herded them into a barbed-wire enclosure, he decided to act.

As the train pulled into the station that was supposed to take the Jews to Auschwitz and the SS Guards were just about ready to load the people up into the box cars that would take them to their death, suddenly, out of the darkness, Metropolitan Kyril appeared. He was a tall man to start with, but as an Orthodox priest, he wore a tall religious hat on his head which made him appear much taller than he was. He was wearing his black robes and with his white beard flowing down over them, he looked imposing. He was marching with many of the townspeople and church members behind him.

He went to the entrance of the barbed-wire enclosure, which was surrounded by his supporters. When the Nazi guards tried to stop him, he laughed at them and pushed aside their guns. He went in among the Jews and as they surrounded him, crying hysterically, he raised his hands. He quoted one verse of scripture, and with that verse he contributed significantly to the changing of the destiny of a nation. He quoted from the book of Ruth and he declared to his Jewish friends, "Whither thou goest, I will go. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God!"

The Jews cheered. The Christians cheered. They were no longer separate people. They had become one in the declaration of the word of God.

The guards didn't know what to do. They finally released all those they had rounded up. Because of such a willingness to give influence for God in this world, not a single Bulgarian Jew ever died in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II.

One person can make a difference. One person, living faithfully can influence our world.

So let me ask you, when you see something not right in our world, are you willing, will you be willing to use your influence to make a difference for God in this world?

May God help us live, lives of faithfulness.

Amen