

Message: “The Comfort Zone Part 2”, Week 6 of “Challenges Series”, presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 10-23-2016 at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

In our first scripture, we find Nehemiah, a Jew and a high official in the Persian court, heartbroken. He has just found out that his hometown has been decimated.

Nehemiah 2:1-6

¹Early the following spring, in the month of Nisan, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never before appeared sad in his presence. ²So the king asked me, “Why are you looking so sad? You don't look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled.”

Then I was terrified, ³but I replied, “Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For Jerusalem, the city where my ancestors are buried, is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”

⁴The king asked, “Well, how can I help you?”

With a prayer to the God of heaven, ⁵I replied, “If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.”

⁶The king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked, “How long will you be gone? When will you return?” After I told him how long I would be gone, the king agreed to my request.

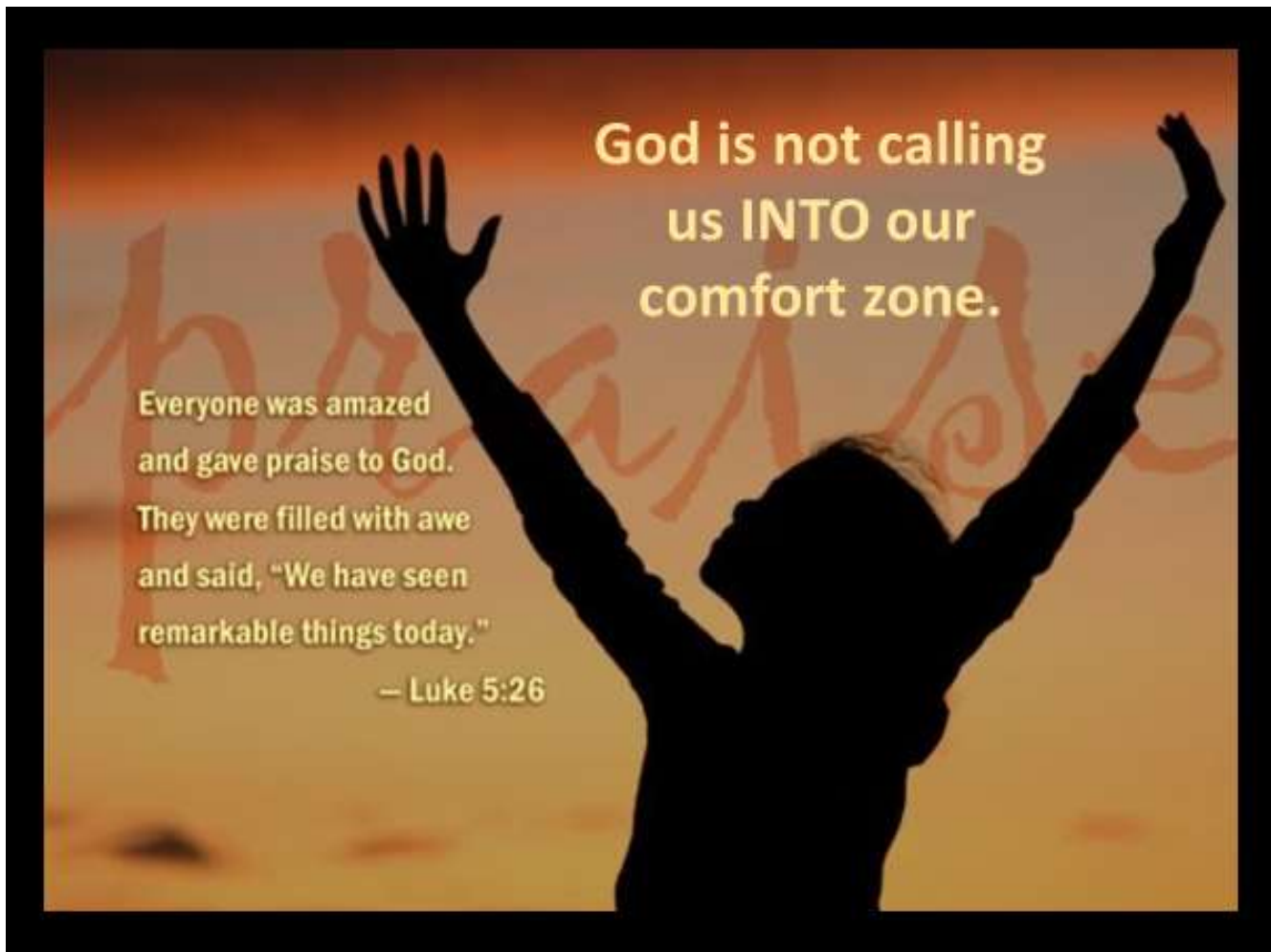
Later, in Colossians, Paul reminds us in his letter to the church at Colossus that we if we are to truly love God and be Christ's disciples, there's also a call to action. We can't just feel it in our hearts, we must also practice this love in everything we say and do.

Colossians 3:16-17

¹⁶Christ's message in all its richness must live in your hearts. Teach and instruct one another with all wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts. ¹⁷Everything you do or say, then, should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks through him to God the Father.

May God's eternal words move in our hearts deeply enough to motivate us to action. Amen.

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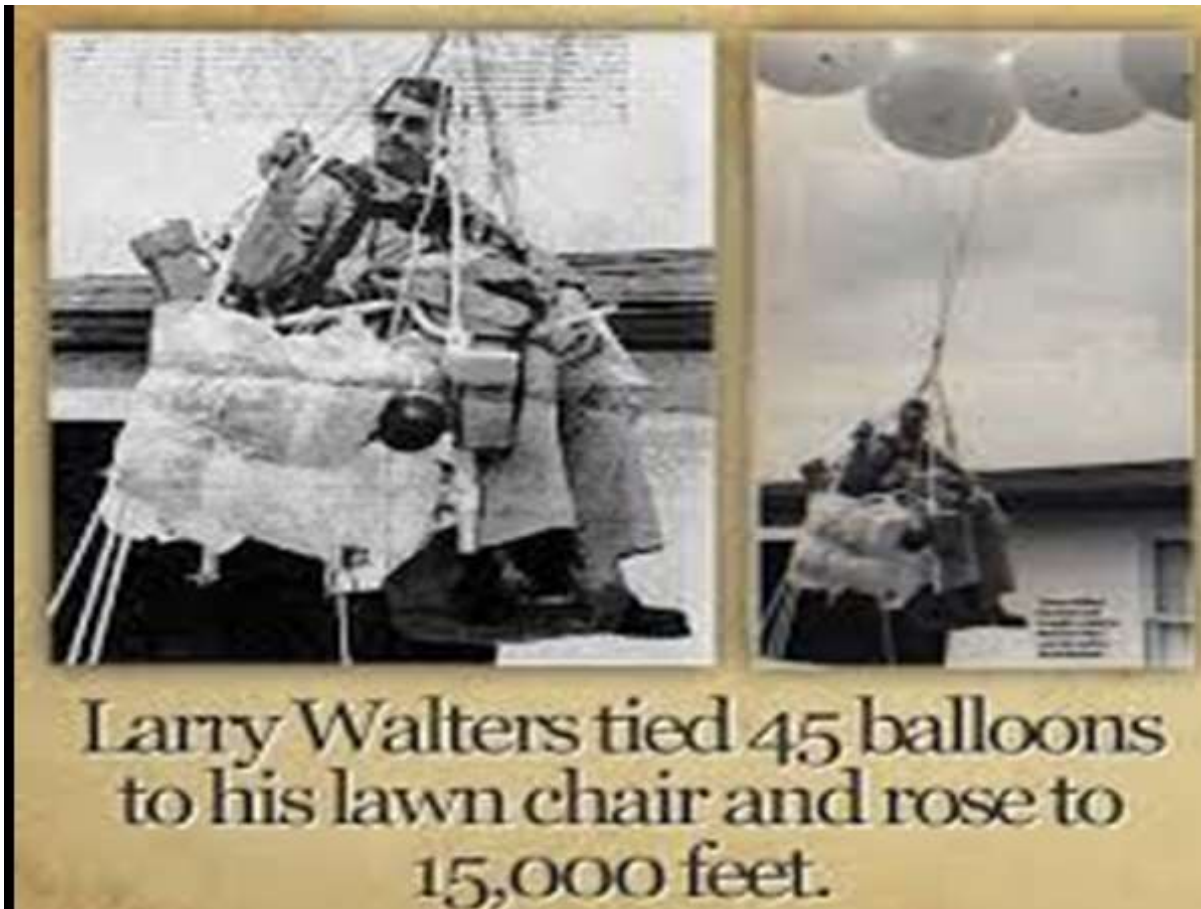


Ask people to step out of their comfort zones. Amen! Yes!

It's hard to step outside your comfort zone... isn't it?

But once you do... once you get your mind around how uncomfortable it is and open yourself up to God's blessings, it can feel pretty darn good!

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Several years ago, I heard the story of Larry Walters, a 33-year-old man who decided he wanted to see his neighborhood from a new perspective. He went down to the local army surplus store one morning and bought forty-five used weather balloons. That afternoon he strapped himself into a lawn chair, to which several of his friends tied the now helium-filled balloons. He took along these items: a six-pack of beer, a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, and a BB gun, figuring he could shoot the balloons one at a time when he was ready to land.

Walters, who assumed the balloons would lift him about 100 feet in the air, was caught off guard when the chair soared more than 15,000 feet into the sky -- smack into the middle of the air traffic pattern at Los Angeles International Airport. Too frightened to shoot any of the balloons, he stayed airborne for more than two hours, forcing the airport to shut down its runways for much of the afternoon, causing long delays in flights from across the country.

Soon after he was safely grounded and cited by the police, reporters asked him three questions:

"Where you scared?" "Yes."

"Would you do it again?" "No."

"Why did you do it?" "Because," he said, "you can't just sit around."

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We’ve been talking about everyday challenges. The past two weeks have been the everyday challenge of stepping out of our comfort zones.

Often times we ask God to bless this or that, we listen to the news and we hope for miracles and change. We want a better world. We want better lives.

But in order to have positive change, there must be action! We can’t just sit around.

JAMES 2:14-17

**What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say
you have faith but do not have works?**

Can faith save you?

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food,

**¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep
warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply
their bodily needs, what is the good of that?**

¹⁷ So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Those are pretty big words! What he is essentially saying is that if you claim to have faith, if you claim to love God, if you claim to be a disciple, it will show in how you live your life and respond to others.

Christ himself says, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” ~ Matthew 5:18.

We know when God wants us to take action... we feel a stirring in our hearts. It’s a tug toward doing something uncomfortable. It may look like volunteering for something you’ve never done before. It may look like saying something encouraging to a stranger. It may look like stepping up financial giving to the church and its ministry. Whatever it is, it’s the Holy Spirit working within you to grow you in Christ Jesus. To grow your discipleship.

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Nehemiah was a displaced Jew living a thousand miles from his hometown of Jerusalem in what's known today as Persia, or Iran.

He had risen to prominence as the cupbearer to the king of Persia, and he lived quite a comfortable life in the king's palace. He slept on satin sheets and down pillows. He was living the good life!

Yet one fateful day, some of Nehemiah's Jewish friends returned from a jaunt to Jerusalem. And he asked them a question that ended up changing his life: "How are things at home?" And they said, "Nehemiah, it's not good. The walls have been demolished, the gates have been burned down, and the people are living in shame and disgrace."

When Nehemiah heard this, it was like he had been punched in the gut. It buckled him. It swept him off his feet and onto his knees! And he began to cry out to God... but not for just a moment... For four months he prayed until God showed him what to do!

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When God speaks to our hearts and compels us to step out of our comfort zone, we have a choice. We can faithfully obey, no matter how uncomfortable it is. Or, we can choose to ignore it.

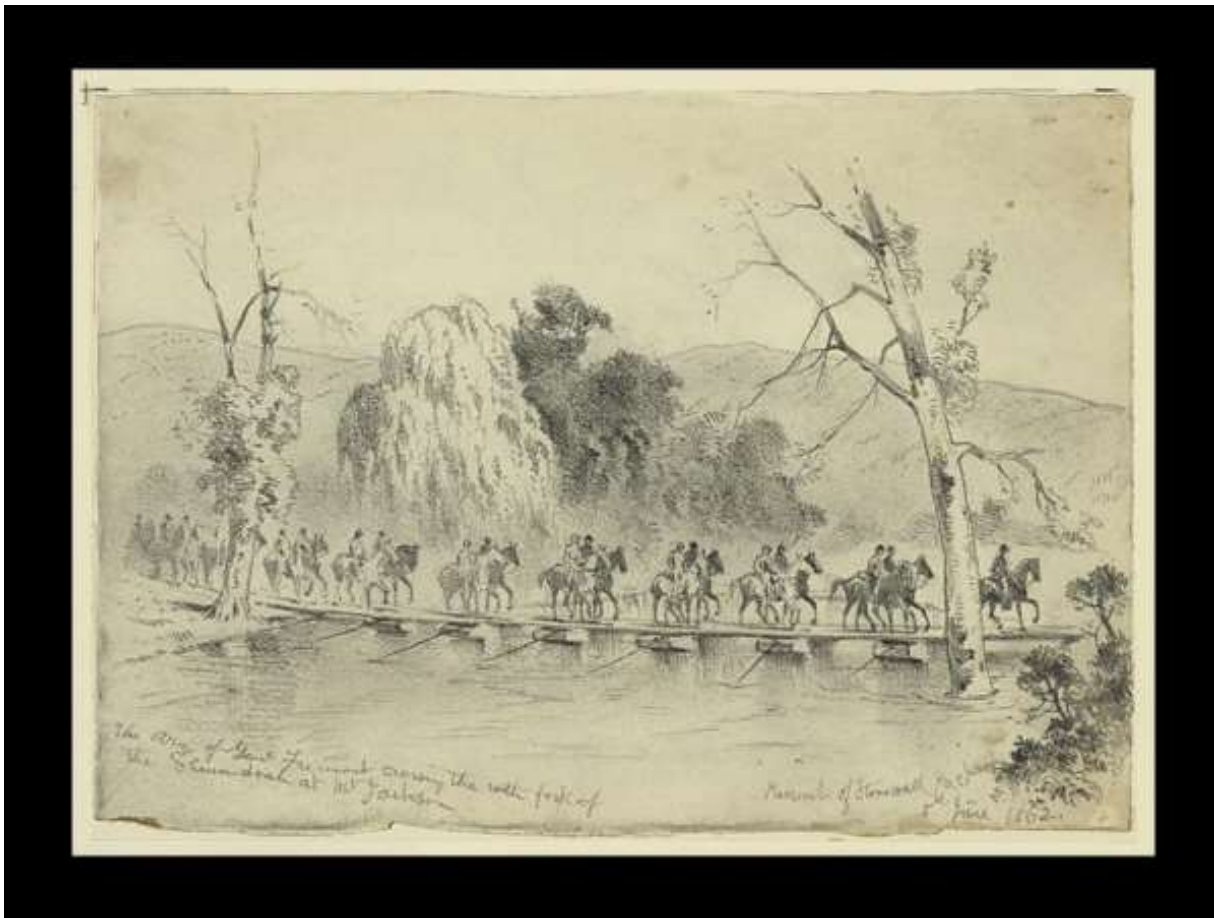


Nehemiah refused to ignore what God was telling his heart...which was to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. He could have continued to live in luxury in Persia, he could have sent money, he could have prayed for the people back in Jerusalem and asked God to bless them... but Nehemiah believed that when he prayed for the situation in Jerusalem, God compelled him to go and be part of the solution... and that meant that Nehemiah had to step out of his comfort zone.

When I was young, I felt a call to pastoral ministry. It was pretty strong. But my parents convinced me that it wasn't the thing to do. As I grew, I saw pastors that I got to know deal with some really rough stuff. One pastor I know was so rejected by his congregation that he ended up leaving ministry altogether, questioning his call.

My career at the time was going well. I was good at what I did and enjoyed my job. One day, in prayer, I asked God to deepen my walk with him. I believe that I heard very clearly God say, "If you really want to deepen your walk with me, if you really want to follow me and be more than just a casual disciple, are you willing to do what might not be comfortable? Do you really want this or are you saying it to make yourself feel good. Because, if you really mean it, then it's not going to be easy. You'll have to step out of your comfort zone.

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Dr. J.B. Gambrel tells an amusing story from General Stonewall Jackson's famous valley campaign. Jackson's army found itself on one side of a river when it needed to be on the other side. After telling his engineers to plan and build a bridge so the army could cross, he called his wagon master in to tell him that it was urgent the wagon train cross the river as soon as possible. The wagon master started gathering all the logs, rocks and fence rails he could find and built a bridge. Long before day light General Jackson was told by his wagon master all the wagons and artillery had crossed the river. General Jackson asked where are the engineers and what are they doing? The wagon master's only reply was that they were in their tent drawing up plans for a bridge.

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If our leader says go... I have equipped you and will be with you... sitting around contemplating our navels is not going to get us there. Jesus calls us, prepares the way, equips us, leads us and walks with us.

I believe God is doing this today. He's stirring your heart to do something for His glory.

God is calling you to step out of your comfort zone... to do the unusual thing... to do the counter-cultural thing... to make His kingdom great!

Now, please, don't misunderstand me. You don't have to be a pastor, a missionary, or a super-spiritual star or hero! All you have to do is have a heart for God... and a willingness to get out of your comfort zone. It may be something as simple as just walking across the room at a party to talk to someone you normally would have ignored. Or inviting your neighbor over for tea. Or taking a co-worker to lunch to see how they're doing.

Whatever it is, don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone... like Nehemiah did... to do great things for God!

God is looking for men and women who have a heart for Him... who want to take their lives to the next level... who want to step out of the maze of mediocrity and live for something bigger than themselves! It's my prayer that this will be the passion of your heart and life.

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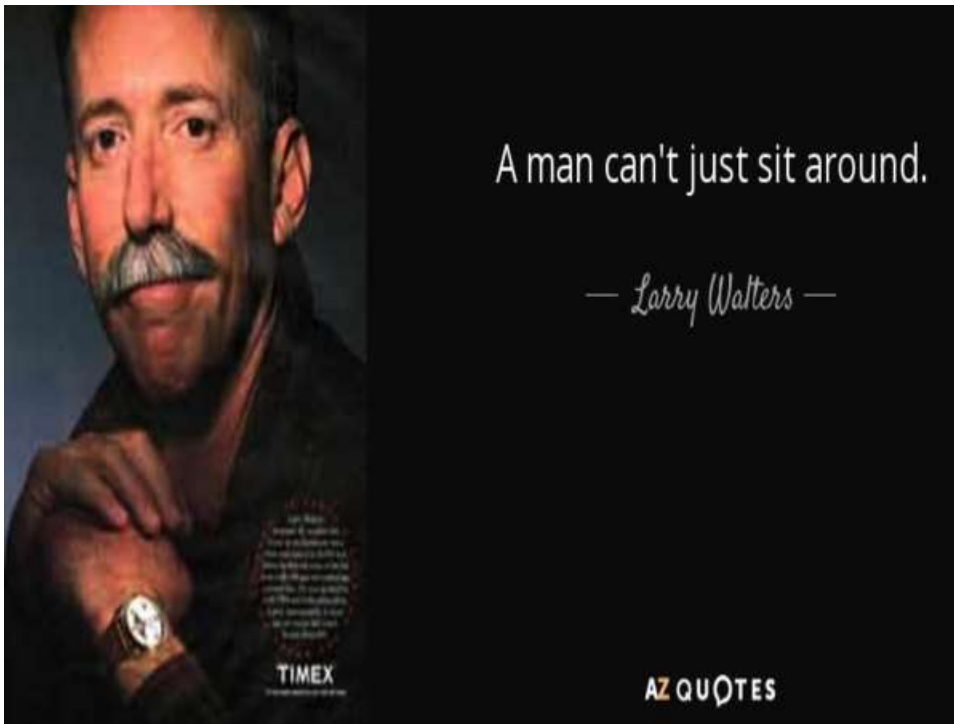
<input type="checkbox"/> Signing up for a Growth Group	<input type="checkbox"/> Increasing my monthly Generous Giving
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting my community through works with: WCC, WNC	<input type="checkbox"/> Taking a step toward church leadership
<input type="checkbox"/> Daily Prayer	<input type="checkbox"/> Studying my Bible
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting my church in a new, challenging way, that I will write below:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forgiving myself and giving up a personal sin

And that’s why today you have the opportunity to respond to God through commitment. In the past we’ve done pledge cards. This one looks different. It has a perforation. The top half will go into the collection plate shortly along with your regular offering. The bottom half you’ll take home to serve as a reminder for the next several weeks as you grow into your covenant with God. We’ll be asking you to bring the bottom half back during Advent where we’ll offer them to God and pray over the commitments made as this congregation grows deeper in love and service to Jesus Christ.

You’ll notice that there’s no place on the card for your name. That’s because this is a covenant between you and God as you live out your discipleship through Christ’s holy church.

Describe and invite people to fill it out.

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We are called to do more than just sit around. We, as disciples, are called to action.