

Preparing For An Harembe

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[0 : 00] Begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, who for us man and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.

He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures. Amen. He of the Spirit, and in the bond of peace, and give us the grace that with one heart and one mouth we may glorify Thee, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. There is a sense in which we are not quite out of Africa yet, and I wanted to talk to you about Africa this morning and next week.

The text that I've chosen this morning has to do with the fact that this morning we begin our campaign, I suppose, to raise the funds for the restoration and renovation of the church in celebration of the 40th anniversary of this building and the 65th anniversary of the parish.

The verse that I want you to think about is from Exodus 25, and it also appears in the prayer book, where it says, They came everyone whose heart stirred him up, and everyone whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering.

[2 : 16] Now, there is a kind of mean and practical way of viewing money, and you might well ask the question, What does raising \$1,200,000 have to do with God?

How do you pray to God for money? To get out and work for it seems to be the only practical way. Why do we depend on God to meet our needs and then turn around and try and do it ourselves? Like that verse from the Psalms which says, Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord.

And we tend to trust in our own resources and our own abilities and our own organization and our own campaign. Where is it that we really depend upon God?

The reason we depend upon God is that I think we're going to be utterly dependent for, in this undertaking, to God having stirred, having people whose hearts have been stirred up and who have been given a willing spirit.

[3 : 39] And that undoubtedly is a word, that is undoubtedly an activity of God in a world like ours, where our aggressiveness and our covetousness and our self-grasping is so characteristic of us.

Our culture demands great sensitivity in the matter of raising money, and people's feelings are easily hurt or their sensibilities offended.

We have to have confidentiality, we have to avoid showmanship, we have to create trust and show responsibility. We have to take appropriate tax advantages and give discreet recognition.

All those things are culturally demanded of us and must be observed in the delicate business of raising money in our society. Well, that's why I want to tell you about what happened last Sunday in St. Andrew's Cathedral in Nakuru in central Kenya.

It's a church that is bigger than this one and has two morning services of more than 600 people at each. And both the services, one in English and one in Swahili, they had what they call a harambe, and this is a Kiswahili word, and it means that it comes from when a tree falls over and blocks the path to a village.

[5 : 23] The village elders call for a harambe. And a harambe means that everybody in the village is called out to take hold of the tree and drag it off the path.

Everybody has to take part. And they all take hold of the tree and the leader calls out, harambe, and the tree moves.

Harambe, and the tree moves. So that word has been picked up and is now used very widely. In fact, Jomo Kenyatta has sort of made it the motto of Kenya.

Well, last week, the provost of the cathedral, David Kenyanjui, stood up and announced the harambe.

He called for two beautifully woven Kenyan baskets to be brought to the front of the church, and then he lifted up his cassock like this, reached in his pocket, pulled out a bill, and put it in the basket where everybody could clearly see what he was doing.

[6 : 37] And then two baskets were brought up. One was on the men's side of the church, and one was on the women's side of the church. And one of the leading laymen of the congregation got up and started to talk to the men of the congregation and say, this is a harambe, and we all need to get in and contribute.

And after he had addressed them for ten minutes or so, the men started to line up in front of him. I visualize certain characters in this congregation doing it.

But, and this, this man stood there, and as people came up to him, they gave him the money.

He held it up and called out, a hundred shillings. A clock. Twenty shillings.

Quiet, you know. And this went on and on. And when he was finished, another man came up and started to make the same kind of appeal, and the man who had been there first was asked to come up.

[7 : 58] And so he came up and he reached in his pocket and he leafed them off. One, two, three, four, five, five hundred shillings.

And into the basket it went and everybody applauded and it was great fun. And on they went. Then the women gave a little talk.

And the women were much less reluctant than the men. And they simply swarmed up and filled the basket with their gifts. And it was a lovely thing to see.

And small children came up because they sat through this two-hour service. Small children came up and they contributed to it. And then when that was all over, one man got up and said, I think there's still lots more.

I'm going to take these baskets and go through the congregation to see if others of you don't want to contribute. And so the Harambe came finally to a conclusion.

[9 : 04] The service was an hour and a half old and I had to preach the sermon then. And it was a great experience.

And I thought we might try it. And then again I thought, well, maybe not this one.

But just, I mean, you just become aware that so much of what we do and the way we do it has to do with sort of cultural values which we're not even conscious of.

But suppose that that's the ultimate truth is the way we do things. Well, approximately a third of the congregation this morning have volunteered and trained to run our Canadian-style Harambe in our parish during the next three weeks.

And beginning this week they will visit five to six hundred homes and families, mostly those homes and families who have already indicated that they acknowledge some financial responsibility for the work and ministry of the parish.

[10 : 28] I am personally very grateful for this visitation program. The picture of someone at the door knocking, the opening of the door, the receiving of a visitor is a very powerful New Testament picture.

It recurs over and over again, one neighbor seeking help from another, receiving a stranger, showing hospitality, and of course the superb picture from the book of Revelation of Christ himself knocking at the door.

We need to take such a knock very seriously. It is a central picture from the New Testament and I think a central activity of the Church of Jesus Christ that we call on one another in Christ's name.

Now, historically, in the past at this church we have knocked at doors to recruit new members, to establish relationships with newcomers, to invite people to a mission, to invite children to the church school, to invite people to share in home groups and coffee and dessert parties, to organize pastoral area groups, just to find out and befriend people.

All practical and sometimes very successful attempts to discover the neighbor whom we are required to love.

[12 : 09] and I am trusting that in this effort more people will be welcomed in more homes and more worthwhile and significant contact will be made as we call this harambe, this gathering together for our parish.

The facts of the situation are these. 150 visitors will make these 500 to 600 visits to homes of our parish.

There are 1,100 homes in the parish. More than half of these have a single member of the parish living in them. Approximately 2,200 people are on our parish list.

About 500 homes are people who are interested in the parish, have indicated that interest, but are uncommitted to the life of the parish.

They will be invited by mail to take part and if at all possible they will be visited. The North Shore team have agreed to visit all the people on the North Shore whose names are on our parish list.

[13:26] Not every group can do that. The Kitsilano group is where we have too many homes and too few visitors. So if you would like and be willing to become a visitor and take an evening of training on Wednesday of this week as listed in your bulletin, please let us know.

The children are gathering one million cents in coins and as Gene Begg suggested, we want them to solicit the support of their uncles and aunts, their friends and neighbors, their parents and grandparents and to take that responsibility on God's team for the work in the parish.

You will be no doubt very encouraged to know that the leadership of this project, the people who have taken responsibility to give leadership to it have, as of this morning, pledged just short of \$500,000 so that the rest is to be picked up.

The other \$700,000 is to be picked up in the course of our, we are praying that it will be picked up in the course of our pledging over the next three weeks.

Leading up to the last Sunday in May when we're asking everybody to bring their pledge to church on that day. The purpose of all this is that this church was built for a cost of \$150,000 40 years ago.

[15:16] we want it to be an attractive place where people will find a place to pray, a place to learn, a place to hear and respond to the good news of God in Jesus Christ, a place to share in the praise of God.

We want this place to be one that is known to be, to practice hospitality to neighbors, to strangers, to travelers, to students, to Christian workers and missionaries, a place which will bear clear witness to the covenant of love that God has conferred on us, and when people come here to make their covenants of marriage, they will do that in the light of God's covenant with us.

It's a place where mourners are to come to be reminded of the life that is stronger than death and the love from which we cannot be separated.

It needs to be a place which will be a second home to everyone in the parish, that every child will be given a treasure of lifelong memories, of joy and love and friends and lessons and faith and moments of inspiration and commitment, that for many it will be the landmark on the face of the earth of the place where people met Jesus.

That's what we want. In practical ways, this means the refurbishing of the church and hall, the walls to be redone inside and outside, better facilities provided, total rewiring and lighting of this building, rearranging of the sanctuary, improving and increasing accommodation.

[17:26] We need a new kitchen, new hospitality center, new classrooms, better accommodation for infants and toddlers, improved gardens and grounds and parking facilities, facilities for libraries, study, tapes, seminars, conferences, quiet days, and facilities for the choir.

We need to be good stewards of the property we've been given and good neighbors to the community in which we are placed.

Now, what I want you to understand is a point which I take from Deuteronomy chapter 20 and that's where Moses is giving instructions to the people about undertaking a campaign and he tells them that when they undertake this campaign, you shall not be afraid for the Lord your God is with you. they were going to war, we have another kind of campaign in mind. But, Moses said there are people whom you have to exempt from going to war.

And he said the one who has built a house but not dedicated it, the one who has married a wife but has not yet got a family, the one who has planted an orchard but has not yet got the first fruits from it.

[18:58] So he saw that there was reasons why even in something which involved the whole nation there are people who should be exempted from the responsibility to take part.

The building of a house and presumably the acquiring of a mortgage might be a reason why you wouldn't take part. Though I'm not sure that the book of Deuteronomy had 20 or 40 year mortgages in mind at the time and the one who had married a wife but not yet established a family together

with her and that the importance for the nation of establishing that family exempted them. The one who had planted an orchard or you might say started a business and therefore couldn't be expected to take part until the first fruits from the orchard came in. You remember the first fruits would belong to God. Those were the people who were exempted. They were to complete what they had begun so that not everybody in the parish will be expected to take part in this, though we would like everybody too because some will have significant reasons to be exempted. But there was another group that were to be exempted as well. And this other group that Moses talks about in Deuteronomy chapter 20, he says, the one who is fearful and faint-hearted, let him go back to his house.

[20 : 47] Let the heart of his fellow, lest the heart of his fellows melt as his heart. And so faint-heartedness exempts you too from the responsibility to take part.

And faint-heartedness and grumbling, Moses says, are contagious diseases. So those people should be isolated from the army so that they don't demoralize the whole army. And in a congregation like that, faint-hearted, like this, faint-heartedness and grumbling can be very demoralizing and very contagious.

And we must be utterly dependent upon God to keep us from that kind of faint-heartedness which is not honoring to the God who has called us to undertake this project.

So you see that when you say, what has God to do with this? I would like to say that we are utterly dependent upon God to grant us courage and love and faith and the supply from a large and diverse congregations with probably many reasons to exempt themselves from this responsibility to call from among us those whose hearts have been stirred and whose spirits have been made willing to give the gifts that will open up the way ahead for us as a parish.

[22 : 31] That's why we very much need to pray. And we need to pray for one another prayer that our hearts may be stirred and our spirits made willing.

Will you just be quiet for a moment now? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Our God grant that we may be kept from the contagion of faint heartedness and grumbling and that you will stir us by your Holy Spirit.

Stir our hearts and make our spirits willing that our response to this harembé might be the response of thankful hearts and willing spirits.

We ask this in Jesus Christ's name. Amen. Can we please kneel?

[24 : 05] Lord, we thank you first for this sunny Sunday in spring and for the freedom and the time to gather together and to worship you.

We're thankful for small things in our own lives, larger things in the life of the church. First, we thank you for the safe return of Fran and Harry from their trip to a land which seems very strange to most of us.

their absence we thank you for as well for it was a reminder of the responsibilities which must fall on us all individually when we do not have the direct guidance that Stephen and Ernie and Harry offer so freely to us when they are with us.

we look ahead to the future of our parish, a future that will eventually be under the guidance of others and ourselves and we ask for your wisdom to be shown through us in preparing the church for that time.

so it is that today we pray especially for the visiting that will be happening. We pray that the visitors will be prepared in a thorough way that their preparation will be the result of prayer, that their message will be understood, that the practicality of the renovation plans be evident both in the plans themselves and in the hearts and minds of the congregation to whom the appeal is made.

[26 : 35] We thank you in advance and in expectation for the generosity that will be shown and we thank you for the generosity that has already been shown.

despite all of our blessings Lord, many of us are sick at heart without hope.

We face horrors without an understanding of your presence. We face insecurity and self-doubt and the faint-heartedness of which Harry spoke is a very real thing to us.

If we were to keep apart the faint-hearted in our parish, we would need a large part of the church. I would be there.

Many of us would not feel that we were among the brave. Use us nonetheless and bring home to us your presence in a way that lifts our hearts, banishes the horrors, the horrors of the unknown, of the meaninglessness of an existence without you.

[28 : 07] Amen. please be with those in the parish who are sick in body, who are suffering, for whom the sunshine of the day and the joy of existence can only be appreciated through a fog of distraction, the kind of distraction that pain and nausea and sickness can bring.

We ask that wherever those people be, that you be with them. We pause now to think of others that we know personally.

thank you for the diversity of your church, Lord.

Thank you for the story that Harry has told us of the colorful service in a land far away, something that might seem inappropriate here, or perhaps needs to be tried here.

Thank you for the fact that we are diverse, and so that you use the diversity of your church to reach each and every one of us finally, in our own way, and in your own way.

[29 : 52] return to page 736 of the prayer book and pray the thanksgiving in the middle of the page.

O most merciful Father, we humbly thank thee for all thy gifts so freely bestowed upon us, for life and health and safety, for power to work and leisure to rest, for all that is beautiful in creation and in the lives of men, we praise and magnify thy holy name.

But above all, we thank thee for our spiritual mercies in Christ Jesus our Lord, for the means of grace and for the hope of glory.

Fill our hearts with all joy and peace in believing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen.