

## *The courage to stand up and rebuild!*

*Haggai 1:15b; 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17*

The courage to stand and rebuild. The scriptures remind us that we are broken, but hopeful believers. The prophet Haggai tells reminds the people of faith that God will give them the courage to hold on to tradition while seeing the present for what it is. While Paul writes to the Thessalonians telling them to stand firm and holdfast to the traditions. At first this might seem problematic. How do we stand firm and holdfast for traditions while God shakes the heavens and the earth the sea and the dry land so that the treasures of all nations shall come?

On this day when we remember the sacrifices that were made by so many people so that we can have a better life; a life of freedom and security. On this day when we also engage in the act of Remembrance; remembering Jesus through feasting together on bread and wine we are called to remember the promises made by God: that God will be with us; that we have been forgiven; and that we are now called to live in this world in the abundance of all that we have. The question we are faced with today is this: How do we show that we appreciate the sacrifices that were made? How shall we live to demonstrate that we are grateful for those who have gone before us, who have given us these freedoms?

God spoke through the prophet Haggai and said to the people who were living in the rubble of what once was the temple, take courage for my spirit abides among you; do not fear. Haggai was trying to inspire the people who had returned from exile to continue with the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. He feared that the people had lost their priorities and focus. It seemed that they were more focused on their own homes and personal security rather than faith and their community. So what would it mean for us to put God first? Haggai gives us the great promise that God is truly with us even when we struggle. We too have a responsibility to those who have come before us to rebuild the body of Christ in this world as Haggai was encouraging the people who had been exiled. But are we simply to replicate what once was or are we called to live into the new world to keep making a better life for those who are to come, to keep improving on what we have done in the past learning from it and moving forward in a way that helps to heal this world? What will our legacy be for the next generation? If we heed the words of Paul today to the Thessalonians and take these words to heart, we need to take time to discern who we are who's we are and what we are now called to do. What traditions shall we hold onto while living into the future?

I've had many conversations with people in the last stages of their life and what is abundantly clear is that they want people who are left behind to live their life fully with no regrets. They don't want us to stop living. They want us to be happy and to enjoy what they will no longer be able to enjoy. Of course, they still want to be remembered but not at the cost living our lives and having them simply standstill. And when I talk with parents what is abundantly clear to me is that they want their children to have what they did not. A faith community is no different then parents with their children people who have died with their loved ones who were left behind. The people who built this sanctuary want us to use it to serve the world as Jesus would do; to build on what they started. And I would suggest that the things we need to hold on to, their traditions that we need to hold on to are this: we need to keep that spirit of risk; to be willing to take risks as our forebears have done; we need to respond to the needs of our community, to act on our social conscience; we need to advocate for those who are oppressed and without a voice in our society; and last but not least we need to be pioneers, by being a sacred presence in the secular world in a time where there is great loneliness and conflict.

Mary Eleanor Johns proclaims:

“Both in the passage from Haggai and in the context of the post-modern world, the temple is not merely a building but a community of faith living in response to God. Just as a family may look at an old farm and relish the yesteryear without putting effort into tilling the soil and planting the seed, so the present community may be unwilling to do *the work necessary for a rich harvest. YHWH calls God's people into relationship with God and one another. Sustaining both relationships is key to building and supporting the community of faith, so is constant assessment of our expectations. The church cannot live on what it was in the past.*”<sup>1</sup>

Now there are many articles and quotes like you've just heard that talk about how churches need to reinvent themselves in order to remain alive vital and healthy in this world. God is calling us not to rest on our laurels, our ancestors are calling us not to rest on our laurels but to take action and responsibility of protecting the vulnerable, helping to heal the world while at the same time building up the body of Christ. A church without a mission in the world will not survive. A church that lives out their faith in the world will help to discover the treasures of all the nations that God is shaking up from the heavens. And with that the House of God can then continue to be a place of abundance. What are we willing to sacrifice for the next generations? How will we live our lives as examples of what it means to put God first? What does this look like?

Robertson-Wesley is truly a Church of the community. Our desire to live out our statement of welcome and inclusion sends the message to people in the community that no matter who you are where you have come from what you have done or who you love or even what you believe in you are welcome here you are part of the faith community of Robertson Wesley. In partnership

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Eleanor Johns, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 4 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 268.

with God and by following the examples of Jesus we strive to love one another without exception. When one of us feels lost another will stand by us with no expectations of something in return. When one of us has hurt someone else we will move towards forgiveness and seek reconciliation. When we put God first, we are given the courage and strength to be a compassionate presence in this world. James Miller and Susan Cutshell write the following: ‘the face of the Divine in you recognises the face of the Divine in the other person. When you stand before one another in this way you are on holy ground.’<sup>2</sup>

Being a compassionate presence means that we are intertwined in a relationship with one another and we need to remember that this does not mean that we are co-dependent nor are we excessively responsible and nor shall we assume another's pain. Joyce Rupp writes, ‘the process of compassion involves delicate balance; we do what we can to help alleviate suffering but, avoid being “fixers”; not hovering around, butting in or acting like some sort of saviour like thinking, without me, they won’t get well, can’t change or will be unable to die peacefully.’<sup>3</sup> also shared a quote from Rabbi Rami Shapiro and he reminds us of the following, ‘If I come to you in pain, you end up with the same pain. All that we have done is add to the world's suffering we have done nothing to alleviate it.’ I want you to understand my pain, to respond to it deeply, but not to take it on yourself. I want you to help me see what you see and what I can not see. I want you to engage my pain as if I were an actor in a drama you were watching; mirror my experience, but don't embrace it as your own.’<sup>4</sup>

I think this is a helpful distinction. Continuing to live our lives does not mean that we do not care; it does not mean that we are not compassionate and loving. During the Last Supper Jesus was very clear that the best way that we could remember him after he was gone was to come together as friends in community where we feast together, where we make amends with one another so that when we share the bread and wine we remember what Jesus did, what Jesus believed, what Jesus calls us to do and we are made whole through faith. Yes, we are broken but we are hopeful believers. Even when we feel exhausted and burnt out, we will receive love, peace and compassion by the spirit. The spirit will provide us with courage when we feel like what we are facing seems impossible. We will receive strength when we feel we have none. We will receive nourishment when we feel parched, and we will receive direction when we feel lost. When we open ourselves to all that is offered us, we will be inspired to start living as God intended; we will start to see the possibility of what we can become and we will remember and honour the sacrifices that have been made by those who have come before us. We will use these opportunities to impact the world in a positive way and leave the next generation with a legacy to build up the body of Christ. As we go from here today remember; put God first. Let us honour the legacies that have been left for us and let us build on the tradition of living on the edge taking chances and risks in the name of God to love and serve others in this world. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup>Joyce Rupp, *Boundless Compassion; Creating a Way of Life*, (Notre Dame, Sorin Books, 2018), p. 89

<sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, p. 90.

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