

## *How does it look now?*

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

I've always liked the prophets because they make me think. The prophet Haggai has a challenging message for both the people of the past and for us this day. Haggai was speaking to a people who had been captive, enslaved, and exiled. Who had now returned home. Had been set free and who were being presented with an opportunity. An opportunity to rebuild their community. The world that we live in was also exiled over COVID and we are not returning to what we once knew, but we have returned home. Home, ready, and called to rebuild. I wonder what answer we would have to the question that Haggai asked the exiled when he said, "Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory - how does it look now?" According to Martha Stern, "Many scholars say that Haggai provided much of the energy for the rebuilding of the temple when the children of Israel returned from Babylon. Haggai looked around at the people rebuilding their own homes and not doing anything about rebuilding the temple, and he called them on it."<sup>1</sup>

Things have changed in our world they have changed in our faith community. The last few months have been a hard one for many of us. As we have been facing the loss of some very dedicated volunteers. People who have been doing the work of the church for a very long time. Some of you have begun to notice that there are many new faces in the pews. It's human nature to look around and remember the past and be nostalgic about what we once had. But God does not want us to simply live in the past. God wants us to look to the future. To be agents of change in the future. God teaches us that in the end is truly our beginning. As one chapter in the history of this faith community closes another always begins. We're not being asked to forget what once was. But we are being asked to remember what we have learned from the past. To take these new learnings as we continue to grow and move forward as a community of faith. Haggai proclaims take courage. He says this, not once, he says this twice, take courage and remember to put God first. For God is going to shake things up so we have no choice but to look to the future.

God's message for us today, as I said, is to take courage because God's spirit is among us. And God will give prosperity to us in this time of restoration. Haggai proclaims that God is truly present with us as we struggle with the past and as we move into the future. He proclaims that God will provide us with all that we need. So, I invite you, literally, to look around. Look into

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<sup>1</sup> Martha Sterne, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 269.

the eyes of the other people sitting near you, cross the way, up, behind – take a look around and see the spirit of God in each and every person that is around you. Each person here, and those of you who are online, are truly a gift from God. Each person here and online are the people who will begin to create the new vision of Robertson-Wesley. Our mission and our ministry in the world, in the community in which we serve.

For the Israelites the call to rebuild the temple wasn't literally to build a temple. It was a call to be in relationship with one another and to be committed to God. Haggai's warning that God will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea, and the dry land, and all the nations, was a response to the fact that the Israelites had in that moment forgotten about the temple, forgotten about the core values. The temple was

the place where the people would praise and worship God. The God who had set them free. The temple was a reminder of the call of God to care for people. That we need to care for each other. And when God shakes the heavens and earth, God will fill the house with splendor, with abundance. God will provide the people with what they need to rebuild. Truly indeed that is the case for us now.

The act of remembrance helps us to not lose sight of what others fought for. The sacrament of Communion is an act of remembrance of what Jesus taught and proclaimed. Taking time to remember, in these ways, helps us to appreciate all that we have. Reminds us to not waste the opportunities of what has been given to us. The opportunities to make this world a better place. To improve and heal the lives of others who have suffered. To nourish our own souls. To return to God. To recommit ourselves to God. To nurture that relationship with God, through acts, like remembrance, through rituals like Communion. Through worshipping with one another and serving the world with love.

How will the church look when we have the courage to let God shake things up? We need to trust in God as we move forward. If we trust in God, we can move forward with confidence. We need not fear, as many of us do, that we might make the wrong choice. Don't let your fear stop sharing what God has given to you to share with others. And we pay attention to God and listen to the spirit, God will guide us and show us the path that we need to take. And this requires the wisdom of every single one of you. We need to start seeing ourselves as a part of the mission of Robertson-Wesley regardless of how long or how short a time you've been a part of this community of faith. We are being asked today to take up the mantle that the people before us carried.

Many of you know that Gary Pecknold and Janet Clark have passed away and I hope that their spirit of hospitality, their dedication to their church and their faith and to God will deepen our own faith. That what they did, and what they offered, will inspire us to reconnect, to put God first and be part of the rebuilding of this faith community. Robertson-Wesley is a place that has

an abundance of resources. God has shaken up our foundations and provided us with an abundance and I see it out there. We need to invest our spirit, our commitment, all that we have been given to serve this community and the world with a spirit of caring, spirit of love, spirit of acceptance and belonging. I was reminded recently of a quote from Leonard Coen's song called *Anthem*, that says, "Ring the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering, there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in". As God shakes the foundations upon which we stand, we need not fear. Take courage for the cracks will bring in the light. And may the light and love of Christ fill the cracks of your broken heart. May it bring healing and hope for the future. This is what God has called us to do. Take courage and share with one another. Thanks be to God.