

"A House Filled with Splendor"

Dr. Rich Knight

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Haggai 1:1-4, 2:1-9

I've been utilizing the Common Lectionary this Fall. As you probably know there are assigned passages for each Sunday. Haggai 2 is the Old Testament lesson for today. It took me a while to find the book of Haggai. I'm certain I've never preached from this book before. That's one of the advantages of the lectionary - it forces you to consider passages you'd be tempted to overlook. Haggai is found in the prophets section of the Old Testament. He lived during a very important time in Israelite history - the end of the Babylonian Captivity. - 6th Century, BC. The Babylonian Captivity, the Jews being carted off to Babylon, was the worst time period in their history. When the Persians conquered Babylon in 539 BC things changed for the Jews. The Persians allowed the Jews to return to Palestine, to the Promised Land. The Persians also allowed religious freedom in the lands that they conquered and controlled. So the Jews were allowed to not only rebuild their towns and cities, such as Jerusalem; they were also able to rebuild their religion. That's where Haggai comes in. The year here is 520 BC. And Haggai has a word from the Lord. Let's take a look:

Haggai 1:1-4 - (Note - "house of the Lord" = Temple)

In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house. Then the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?

Haggai 2:1-9

In the second year of King Darius, in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts.

You know, one of the things I like about life is, life often gives us a second chance. In tennis you get a second serve. In golf you sometimes get a mulligan. In baseball, there's always next year. You see second chances in the world of politics. The Republicans seemed headed nowhere just a short while ago. Now, they get a second chance to wield some influence. Gov. Patrick gets a second chance. It seems to me even President Obama gets a second chance after the message sent in this past week's election.

Life gives us second chances, new opportunities to start over, to begin again. Often we get a second chance in relationships, to renew and restore them. Many of us made a total mess of a first marriage, and failed at something very important. But God and life give us second

chances. Thank God for second chances.

In the passage this morning, the Israelites were getting a second chance, a second chance to live in the land of God's promises. It was a second chance at living as God's people, a new opportunity to live in covenant with God, a new opportunity to be a faith-filled people, a worshipping people, a chosen people. Haggai has a word from God that it's time to rebuild the Temple, Solomon's Temple, the great Temple in Jerusalem, which was destroyed in 586 BC. This would not be an easy task. There were those who remembered the first temple. "Those were the good ole days." Those folks felt that a new temple could never match the first one. Haggai was bold enough to say, "This one will be even better." - "The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former."

There were also those who'd gotten used to the first temple in ruins. Those remaining in Jerusalem still had some form of worship there (making offerings and sacrifices), even those most of it lie in ruins. In fact, from the time when the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem, it took them almost 20 years to get around to rebuilding the Temple. They had gotten used to it being in ruins. Sometimes we can get used to almost anything.

I remember an illustration I heard a long time ago about putting fire flies in a jar. I'm told that if you put them in a jar, they will of course try to fly out. They'll crash into the top of the jar for quite a while, but then they'll give up. You can even take the lid off the jar, and they won't try to escape. They get used to captivity. We can get used to a lot of things, can't we? We can get used to abuse. We can get used to neglect. We can get used to low expectations, mediocrity. We can get used to apathy, depression, sub-par outcomes and sub-par lives. Fill in the blank - we can usually get used to it. The Israelites had gotten used to not practicing their religion, at least not wholeheartedly. I suspect that because of the exile they felt let down by

God and decided, "What's the use now?" That really wasn't an inspiring answer, but they had gotten used to it.

So along comes Haggai to shake things up. He tells them to have courage. Rebuilding the Temple wouldn't be easy. He tells them God is with them. This is a holy endeavor. And he tells them to get to work.

Vs. 4 "Take courage, all you people," says the LORD; "work, for I am with you," says the LORD of hosts.

I read recently about Albert Schweitzer's work in Africa, in Lambarene. When Dr. Schweitzer returned after his first furlough, he found the buildings of his small hospital almost falling down, in complete disrepair. He would have to rebuild them with his own hands. He described the experience as a shift from poetry to prose. The poetry of his African adventure was over. He had entered a period of prose. There's not much poetry in Haggai. Basically his message is, "Let's get to work. Let's rebuild the Temple." It was a time for prose, not poetry, work, not reflection. But of course, working for God can lead to great things.

C.S. Lewis told of a stone mason working on St. Paul's Cathedral in London. All his life this man worked on one small part of the cathedral. One day someone asked him, "Don't you get tired of doing the same thing over and over again, and you'll never see the finished work. It must be so meaningless." The mason replied, "I'm building a great cathedral to the glory of God. I find this incredibly meaningful."

For the glory of God. Prose can lead to poetry. That's what God promised through Haggai. "I will fill this house with splendor." That's the line I thought about all week. "I will fill this house with splendor." This new Temple in Jerusalem, built upon the ruins of the old one, would be filled with splendor. I wonder what that means? I wonder what it would mean if

this house would be filled with splendor? Or perhaps it already is?

The Dictionary has several definitions of "Splendor." It means, "Great brightness," like the splendor of the sun. It means, "a quality that outshines the usual." - "brilliance, magnificence, glorious." The word splendor comes from the Latin root, "splende," which means "to shine." I guess it means that our lives would shine for God, - they'd shine with "great brightness." We would "outshine the usual."

And of course a church filled with splendor would shine for God as well, shine with unusual brightness. Jesus said, *"You are the Light of the World Let your light shine before all, that people may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*

Well, in just 4 years, Haggai and his friends built got that Temple built. They got a Second Chance and they took it! That Temple stood for over 500 years. It was a place where people met with God. It was where they prayed and worshipped and offered themselves to God. It indeed was filled with splendor. The splendor of God's love.

Let's seek that love this morning, for our lives, for our church, as we come to the table to commune with our Savior.

Let's seek to be a house and a people filled with the splendor of God.

Let us pray:

Come to us now, O God. Fill our hearts and our lives with the splendor of your love, that we might shine for you. Amen.