

The Righteous Remnant

Haggai 1:15-2:9

This is the third in our series of the lesser known voices from our faith tradition. Like Joel and Habakkuk, little is known about the prophet Haggai. With his entire known composition only involving two chapters, we get a small peek into his world. There are some things we can glean from this book. We know that Haggai wrote during the post-exilic period. The Babylonian occupation of Palestine (during which Habakkuk wrote) was ended by their defeat by the Persians. The Babylonian administration policy had been to move people off their land and into other places. The Persians allowed the native people to return to their homeland. So sometime after 538 BCE the people of Judah began returning home and what they found was devastation. The Babylonians had plundered their treasury and their temple. The Persian government helped to recover some of those artifacts and returned them to their original owners. It was really a remarkable grace-filled gesture for a people who for so long had been abused by their much more powerful neighbors.

The returning exiles made an initial half-hearted effort to re-build the temple when they returned but that soon fell by the wayside. People needed to re-build homes, plant crops, defend themselves from the nearby Samaritans who were a constant source of irritation. And so the temple was left in ruin.

Haggai speaks several years after the exiles return and he says, “It’s time.” It’s time to rebuild. It’s time to change our priorities. I know that the task seems huge, but we can do it.” And within five years they had rebuilt the temple. It wasn’t the same spectacular building it had been in the time of Solomon but they now had a place to worship again. And this destitute, exiled, poor and broken people made it happen.

Each of the prophets we have listened to over the last three weeks have spoken to different experiences in the time and life of their people. They spoke to different obstacles confronting their day and as a result, their messages were different from each other. It is the call of the prophetic to

speak to the issues facing the community in its circumstances and challenges. Haggai said some things that were just the opposite of what Jeremiah had said generations earlier. In Jeremiah's time, people had turned their rituals and adoration of the temple into idols. Jeremiah warned them that buildings and liturgy exist to serve God and prepare people for life. For Haggai, it was a time for the people to focus on the structure and create a place – a space – that once again reflected the Presence and Glory of God. Haggai wanted them to focus on the actual building and remember what it represented. Both spoke the truth their people needed to hear in the times in which they found themselves.

We have experienced the Jeremiah and Haggai struggle in our own church community as we weigh the costs of owning an aging building in balance with the costs of offering programs, outreach and ministry to our community. Both options have benefits. Both have consequences. [Which prophet shall we listen to for our time?](#)

It seems to me that both prophetic writers were urging their people to be faithful to their mission. Probably most of us would agree that it is the experience of God's presence that we seek in worship. Some people are inspired by architecture to ponder the holy. Some are inspired by the gathered community. Both architecture and a sense of community are tools to experiencing the Presence of God and having our lives changed so that we can then change the brokenness of our world. At the congregational meeting next year in 2011 the Board has asked that a recommendation be presented to the congregation with all the information we will need to make decisions on where we see our church going in the next five years. What do we want to accomplish? How do we resource that work? How do we grow our outreach? How do we grow the depth of our passion and compassion? Do we do it in this building or another? Much of that ground work will be set over the next few months. Some things are already happening. We have changed our structures so that they can function more efficiently. We have aligned our staffing design to meet the mission we say we want to accomplish. We have placed the resources in the places we believe will offer us the best opportunity to succeed. If you have been watching the website or the newsletter or the email blast you will notice many opportunities for

you to use your skills, your experience, your passion in the mission and work of All God's Children. It takes us all doing our part. And when we come together, the synergy of that experience is amazing. We saw it at Bingo last week. It was fun. We made some money for the church. We enjoyed being together. That was another step toward building a solid community. We see it in the Generosity Team as they unveil a plan that will help us be financially solid while at the same time celebrating the accomplishments and possibilities. We see it in the people who offer their leadership year after year like Peter and Andrew and Kathy and Donavon and Mike and Lynn and dozens of others. We pour our lives into this space – into this community – because we have experienced the Presence of God in our lives and we know how it has transformed us and we want others to have the chance to experience it as well.

When the Jews returned from exile, they weren't exactly a mighty nation. They were a demoralized group who looked at the mess that life had presented, faced down their own inner demons, listened for the voice of God calling them higher and they got to work. **It seems that God can always use the remnant to make extraordinary things happen.** If God can use that dispirited, poor and exiled group of nomads, imagine what God can do with a group like us – gifted, intelligent, resourceful, energetic, growing, courageous and free? It's time.

Sources:

www.homileticsonline.com The Haggai Complaint, November 2010.