

The Hope of Resurrection

Our Gospel reading from Luke records an encounter Jesus had with the Sadducees, who questioned Him about the resurrection. They didn't believe in life after death, so they tried to trap Jesus with a trick question about marriage in the resurrection. Jesus replied that in the age to come, people "can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection," (Lk. 20:36). Then, talking about God, He stated, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to Him all are alive," (verse 38).

Jesus reminds us that God is alive and active – and that His purposes do not end with what our eyes can see. He is always doing something new – always bringing resurrection where we see decay. That truth connects beautifully with the Old Testament lesson for today from Haggai 2, where God speaks to people who are discouraged with what seems like failure. The temple they were rebuilding looked so small in comparison to the temple Solomon had built. Yet God promised that "the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," (Hag. 2:9).

It was a message of hope that God's people desperately needed to hear in that day and age, but also one needed in every generation – what God is building now is not less – it's more. God IS alive and working, even when our circumstances seem pretty grim. For us as Methodists, who believe in God's sanctifying grace and constant renewal, this passage is worth taking a look at. If you have your Bible, or Bible app handy, turn with me to Haggai 1:15b-2:9. **Read Haggai 1:15b-2:9.**

Haggai the Prophet

Haggai was a prophet who spoke around 520 BC. He was preaching about eighteen years after the Jewish exiles returned from Babylon. Under the decree of King Cyrus, they were allowed to rebuild Jerusalem. They started the work strong but soon opposition, hardship, and disappointment caused them to stop rebuilding the temple.

By the time Haggai comes on the scene, the people had rebuilt their own homes and returned to the routines of their lives. But God's temple was still a pile of rubble. Haggai's message was a wake-up call from God. "Give careful thought to your ways," (Hag. 1:5), He tells them. The people responded to God's call. They began rebuilding the temple within a month of Haggai first giving them the message.

That's basically where our passage begins – it was a time of renewed obedience – even though the people still felt a lot of disappointment. For us today, the temple represents more than a building. It points to the presence of God among His people. We understand as the Church, generally speaking, that the Church is now the living temple of God. It's not built with stones, but rather with people. God is continually renewing that living temple in every generation.

They Came and Began to Work

Looking a little further earlier in the story than our lectionary passage, we read, “They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month,” (Hag.1:14b-15a). That’s the turning point in the story. After years of apathy, the people finally act. Their obedience begins with a simple but powerful act – they came and began to work. This reminds us that God’s Word demands a response from us.

When God stirs our hearts, we’re called to act – not just believe. John Wesley taught that true faith always expresses itself in acts of mercy and piety – what he called “faith working by love.” As followers of Jesus, and as a local church within the United Methodist Church, we should ask, “Are we working on the house of the Lord?” And I don’t mean working on this church building, when I say that. I mean, are we investing our time, our gifts, our lives in God’s mission?

Notice what happens next. “In the second year of King Darius, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai,” (verses 15b-2:1). This happens about a month after Haggai had first gone to the leaders and the people and told them they needed to rebuild the temple. This time, it’s during the Feast of Tabernacles – a time when Israel remembered God’s faithfulness while they were wandering in the wilderness for forty years. The people have started rebuilding, but the work feels slow. Their enthusiasm is fading.

So, into that discouragement, God speaks again. Friends, the Lord always knows when we need to hear an encouraging word. When the work feels heavy, His word – the Bible – renews our strength. That’s why worshiping together, and Scripture reading are central to our lives as Methodists, and truly – as Christians. In Word and Table, God continually revives our hearts.

“The Good Old Days”?

God tells Haggai:

Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, “Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?” (Verses 2-3).

We read this, and we see the source of the people’s discouragement. Some of the older Israelites still remembered Solomon’s temple in all its splendor – its gold, its beauty, its majesty. Compared to that, the new foundation the people had laid looked pretty pitiful. God recognizes and acknowledges their disappointment. He doesn’t deny it – but at the same time, He doesn’t leave them there, either.

Many of us can relate, if we’re being honest. We remember “the good old days,” when we had seventy people here in the sanctuary, a Sunday School classroom filled to overflowing, and mid-week activities. Nostalgia blinds us to what God is doing in the present. When John and Charles Wesley started the Methodist movement, it started in small groups of sincere believers who were open to God’s Spirit. They weren’t focused on grand buildings, but on keeping their hearts on fire – and having hearts of every

neighbor they met catching fire for God through how they interacted with them. God's presence – not outward splendor – is what brings glory.

Be Strong

Look what God tells Haggai to say next. “But now be strong, Zerubbabel,” declares the Lord. ‘Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty,” (verse 4). Three times God says, “Be strong.” He tells it to leaders and the people alike. Strength doesn't come from our human ability – it comes from His presence.

Then He gives them all a command. “And work.” It follows immediately after Him telling them to “Be strong.” Faith – “Be strong,” and action – “work,” together. The assurance, “I am with you,” echoes the covenant promises God made to Moses, Joshua, and David. God's abiding presence is the power behind every act of faithfulness. In our Methodist theology, this verse captures the heart of grace and discipleship. God's grace empowers our efforts. We work because God IS with us. The Spirit that abides in us gives us the strength to build His kingdom.

God continues to speak to and through Haggai. “This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear,” (verse 5). Again God reminds them of His covenant faithfulness. He never breaks His promises. The same Spirit who delivered them out of slavery in Egypt now dwells among them.

Friends, that same Spirit dwells in us today. At Pentecost, God poured out His Spirit on the Church, making us His dwelling place. As Methodists, we understand this as sanctifying grace. It's the on-going presence of God transforming our hearts and lives, equipping and empowering us to be better image-bearers of Him moment by moment, day by day. “Do not fear.” Those three words appear again and again throughout the Holy Scriptures – in both the Old and the New Testaments. When we know God's Spirit is with us, we're able to face any challenge without fear.

God Shakes the World

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all the nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty,” (verses 6-7). God's “shaking” shows us His willingness to intervene. He disrupts ordinary, human power structures – and even uses nature and natural disasters – to bring about His purposes. Remember how united the nation became after Hurricane Katrina? People went in droves to New Orleans to help – including a group from this church.

Friends, I believe God used the devastation that came from that storm to draw people together, so the Church could shine the light of Christ into the lives of a lot of hurting people. History isn't just a bunch of random events. It's in God's hands, drawing us ever closer to Jesus and His imminent return. He's coming back!

“What is desired by all nations will come,” God tells Haggai to say. That’s Jesus – He’s what’s desired by the nations. His peace. His mercy. His reign of justice and righteousness. When He returns to reign, it’ll be curtains for the politicians. He can’t be bribed or bought. He’s the One who paid the price – His life on the cross – and He’s going to set everything right! Jesus fulfills the deepest longings of every human heart – just some people in our human family don’t know it, understand it, or believe it – yet.

In our time, God continues to “shake” the world. Institutions falter. Cultures shift. Change can be unsettling for us. But through all of it, God is at work. A core belief of Methodism is that the Holy Spirit doesn’t just renew individuals. The Spirit also renews communities, societies, the whole world. The shaking of the world oftentimes is the beginning of revival.

We Are Temporary Stewards

“‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty,” (verse 8). God reminds the Israelites – and us – that He owns everything. In Haggai’s day, the people were discouraged by their lack of resources, but God declares that material wealth isn’t the source of glory. He alone is. God alone is worthy of praise and glory. He deserves all our praise and worship.

This verse challenges our priorities. The splendor of a local church should never be measured by its bank account – or its building. The splendor of a church must always be measured by its faithfulness to God’s mission – of making Christ known to a world in desperate need of Him. That’s what we’re called to do. John Wesley once said, “Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can.” He wasn’t talking about hoarding wealth, but using it for the glory of God who owns it all. At best, you and I are only temporary stewards of what the Lord has entrusted to us at this time, to use what He’s given in such a way to bring Him greater glory.

“‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty,” (verse 9). This is the climax of the story. The new temple may look small, but God’s presence will make its glory surpass the old. The temple that God used Haggai to encourage the leaders and the people to build, known as the second temple, was the same place where Jesus Himself would one day teach, pray, and reveal God’s glory in person.

The Latter Splendor

The greater glory of that temple didn’t come from gold. It came from the presence – the physical presence – of Jesus Christ. This particular verse, in other Bible translations like the NRSV and ESV say, “The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former.” The various translations make the same point – God’s future work will surpass the past.

New Hope, I hope you hear the message of great hope in this Scripture today. God’s work is not done. His work here with you is not finished. Even though our

congregation seems smaller, and our world seems ever more secular, God promises that the glory to come will exceed what has been.

Fourteen or fifteen years ago, we were amazed at what God was doing here. Building this addition. Since then, our numbers have gotten smaller. But the thing God's going to do in us – through us – it's going to be bigger and better than anything we can imagine. I don't know what the future holds, friends, but I know the One who holds the future. He loves us, He wants to use us to reach others, to show them His love. But we have to be willing to be instruments in His hands.

We have to get out of our comfort zones. We have to step up to do things maybe we don't want to do, but know that we need to do them. We have to be willing to hold lightly to things of this world, while keeping a firm grip on the promise given to us by Christ at the cross and empty tomb. Notice the last phrase in our passage: "In this place I will grant peace." In Hebrew, the word *Shalom* means wholeness, harmony, and completeness. It's not the absence of conflict – it's the fullness of God's presence. It's what we seek as followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. He brings the *Shalom* peace of God to us, and gives it to us, free of charge.

Practical Application – Focusing on the *Shalom* Peace of God

So how do we make all this practical today? I've already mentioned a few ways, but here's some other things we may want to try. We're called to rebuild what matters. In Haggai's time it was the temple. For us, it's the Church as a living body. We're called to restore worship, rebuild community, and renew faith. In our Methodist tradition, this means both personal piety and social holiness – loving God and neighbor with all our hearts.

Faith requires action. The people "came and began to work." True faith acts. Methodism has always been a movement of disciplined, practical Christianity – class meetings, acts of service, and mission work rooted in grace. We can't live in nostalgia – the past. Instead, we must look forward in hope. God's promise of "greater glory" tells us that the best days of the Church are not behind us. They're still ahead. The Holy Spirit continues to work in new ways, calling us to innovation, inclusion, and greater mission.

God's presence is what makes us strong. "I am with you," says the Lord. Over and over He says this in the Holy Scriptures. That assurance empowers everything we do. In the sacraments, in Scripture, and in community, the Holy Spirit strengthens us for ministry – and all of us are ministers of the Gospel. We are all a part of the royal priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9).

Peace is the goal of God's work. The promise of peace – *shalom* – reminds us that our mission isn't just to build churches. We're called to build peace – to reconcile, to heal, to make whole. It's what Jesus does for us, and what we do for others when we introduce them to Him. Our Methodist heritage of justice, mercy, and compassion flows from that divine calling.

Haggai's message, spoken to discouraged leaders and people 2,500 years ago, also speaks directly to us today. God is still at work among His people. When our

efforts seem small, or our results are unimpressive, that's okay. God still whispers, "Be strong. Work. My Spirit remains among you." The Church, the Body of Christ, may change in form and structure, but God's presence and promise remains the same. The glory of the latter house – the renewed Church, the transformed world – will surely be greater than the former, because Christ Himself is our glory and peace.

Prayer: Lord of glory and peace, We are thankful that Your Spirit still dwells among us. Strengthen our faith, renew our vision, and help us to see the greater glory You are bringing. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.