

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, November 6, 2016

Haggai 1:15, 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.

Luke 20:27-38

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven

had married her." Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

Let us pray...Amen.

I belong to a group of friends that likes to play trivia on Tuesday nights. There are mostly five of us: two of us in our 50's, and three of us in our 40's. During one of our breaks, we got to talking about what it was like when we were growing up. Though two of us grew up in an earlier decade, we all agreed that times seemed simpler back when we were kids.

We also agreed that we aren't so sure the complications of the modern world as we know it are an improvement over the world as we knew it in the '70's and '80's.

I guess you'd have to say there was a moment of nostalgia for the five of us: Parents aging into the 21st century, raising kids in a time that can seem downright toxic to our children. We didn't come up with any answers, but the consensus was that we were glad we didn't have to grow up in today's world.

The Bible Study I attend each week is comprised of UCC clergy, Lutheran clergy, and United Methodist clergy. We gather each Thursday morning for a couple of hours to discuss the lectionary readings, and any current events or theological concepts that might help us preach on Sunday. We're a week ahead, so this week's scripture was discussed two weeks ago.

I've been a part of this study group for over 10 years now, and in that time, we've come up with a sort of working definition of nostalgia. We've all experienced nostalgia, right? Well, the Bible Study group defines nostalgia as that unique heart ache for the days that never were...

There is something about the way we remember the good old days that leaves out some of the bad stuff, the challenges, the sadness...overall, we tend to remember the good stuff, the heartwarming stuff, the thrilling stuff, and we also tend to romanticize those days as we mature. I'm suspect my friends at trivia left out some of the pain in their stories of growing up as much as I did! Those are much harder stories to tell.

Our Hebrew Scripture touches upon this very idea in relation to the people's perception of the Temple. Haggai asks the faithful, who here remembers when the Temple was in its former glory? Who here thinks it's barely a shadow of its former glory?

The same could be said for the Christian Church of today: who here remembers the church when it was in its glory? Who here thinks it's only a shadow of its former glory? Probably many of us.

But the Prophet Haggai has a message for the faithful from God: don't worry about looking back to the good old days, look forward to the better days. It may not seem so good now, but God promises to not only restore the church to its former glory, God promises to make it better than it ever was!

In fact, our Gospel lesson underscores that very same message, only in a different way: Jesus is very specific with the Sadducees that human institutions don't exist in the Kingdom of Heaven. And even though Jesus used the institution of marriage as an example, we can apply it to all kinds of human made institutions: governments, schools, churches...none of those things will remain in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The good news we get from our gospel lesson this morning is that our God is a God of the living, a God of the present and the future, not a God of the past. Taken with our Hebrew Scripture of God's promise of restoration and reconciliation, we can take comfort that our restoration and reconciliation will come in the future, not from the past. We don't need to dwell on the past, or ache for the past days, because the days will come when God will restore us beyond all our imagination.

Oh, that doesn't mean we can't treasure our memories of our glory days, it just means that we can't ache for them as the ultimate or the ideal. It also means that we must be careful not to put all our spiritual eggs in the human institution basket: God clearly has other plans that do not include even our most cherished institutions.

One of the most hopeful aspects of today's gospel lesson is where Jesus tells us that to God, even the dead are alive. That tells me that when I am dead, I'll still be alive to God, and that those who have gone before me are alive to God, even now!

They are like angels, he says, children of the resurrection.

The path to restoration and reconciliation isn't in recreating the past, in some misguided attempt to achieve past glory, it's in the present, and it's in the future. It's the faithful children of God working together to bring about the kind of world Jesus would be pleased to return to.

The work we can do in Christian Education, in Mission, in the Spiritual Realm with the Deacons, in maintaining our version of the Temple, our building, with the Facilities Board, in fiscal responsibility with the Trustees, all those things speak to the present and the future: to a time when God will restore us to an even greater glory.

What happens when we're moving forward, but always looking back, toward the way we came? We bump into things! Our progress is impeded.

The good news for us today is that our future is secure. Though we are free to fondly revel in our glory days, God won't let us use those times as a measure of how we should be today. There are even better times ahead. And we don't even have to worry about dying! For even when we die, we are alive to the God that created us, nurtured us, and forgives us.

Let us pledge to look to the future as a means of renewing our church, and the church, it's clear to me that God expects it.

Let us not fear the future, and all that it may hold: it is clear that we need not even fear death, that to God, even those who die are alive. The future promises everlasting life. I can't think of a better reason to look to the future. Let's all look there together. Amen.

Prayer for our Veterans

O God, we give you thanks today for our nation's veterans. We honor them for their faithful service to our country, and for what they have done to defend and preserve our freedom. Generation after generation, young men and women have answered our country's call, and their lives have been changed forever.

We are grateful to all who have served, whether in peacetime or in conflict. But today we especially remember those who have been tempered by fire, those who continue to bear wounds of the body or the spirit as a result of what they endured. They lie in our veterans' hospitals or struggle for recovery in rehabilitation centers; they suffer from post-traumatic stress and survivor' guilt; they yearn for peace in their souls.

Dear God, we ask you to heal their wounds, to banish whatever inner demons may haunt them, and to give them peace within so they may return fully to their families and to society.

We thank you, God, for all of our country's veterans — those of past generations, and those who continue to earn this title today. May we never forget what our country has asked of them and what they have given in return. Help us to give them the respect and honor they are due. And strengthen our resolve to build a world modeled on your realm, where war will be pursued no more.

This we ask in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen.