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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 13, 2016
26th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Colossians 3:1-4; Luke 13:23-30

Hymns: 243; 371; 764; 800:2 (244:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Haggai 2:1-9

In the seventh *month*, on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying: ²“Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: ³‘Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, *is this* not in your eyes as nothing? ⁴Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ says the Lord; ‘and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,’ says the Lord, ‘and work; for I *am* with you,’ says the Lord of hosts. ⁵‘*According to* the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!’

⁶“For thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Once more (it *is* a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; ⁷and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the Lord of hosts. ⁸‘The silver *is* Mine, and the gold *is* Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts. ⁹‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the Lord of hosts.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Living in the last times.

One of the blessings of living in the last times is living in the age of fulfillment. The Lord promised to send a Savior into the world, and for thousands of years people waited, looking, hoping for that Savior to come. Some wondered, “Are the promises of the Lord true?” That was always a problem temptation, and many turned to other gods, to dumb idols instead of remaining faithful to the Lord.

The Lord promised to send a Savior into the world, and He did! **“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** (John 3:16). And so began the end times of the world, the age of fulfillment. It began with Jesus coming as our Savior. And its challenges for the believers began then as well. The disciples saw that not all believed, that many of their own people turned away from the Lord. The disciples wondered, **“Are there few that are saved?”** The question has a discouraging tone to it. Things weren’t as glorious as they had imagined things would be, or should be with the coming of the Messiah.

They were not the first children of God to struggle with disappointment at appearances. Our text tells us about the Jews who had returned to Judah after the Babylonian captivity. Decades earlier Nebuchadnezzar had torn down the glorious temple Solomon had built. Now the Lord told them to build a new temple. They had built nice homes for themselves but were neglecting to provide for the worship of the Lord. They were hardly into the project when the spirit of discouragement began taking its toll. It was obvious, especially to those who were old enough to have seen and remember Solomon’s temple, that this temple was going to pale by comparison. The Lord sent His prophet a message for the people to proceed with –

THEME: Building the Lord’s Glorious Temple.

The first exhortation was --

I. Be Strong and Work for the Lord Is with You.

The Lord intervened quickly with a message of encouragement. It was only three and a half weeks since they had started the building of the temple. It was also the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, typically a joyous festival that was to serve as a reminder of how the Lord faithfully provided for the Children of Israel during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. It was a week-long camping outing in the backyard for all the men in every family. It coincided with the fall harvest, so was also celebrating the Lord's providence in the harvest. However, that year the harvest had been poor, and hard times loomed ahead for the people, and they felt dejected.

Now they looked at the temple project and felt deflated. And how were they going to come up with the resources to build a decent temple for worshipping the Lord? At a time when they should have been excited and rejoicing, they were sad and feeling overwhelmed. So the Lord sent Haggai with His message of encouragement.

The Lord directed the message first to Zerubbabel, who was serving as governor under the Persian King, and to Joshua who was the High Priest. So we see that the Lord singled out both the lay leader and the spiritual leader to hear His message, but it didn't stop with them. Haggai was also to address the remnant of the people that had returned from Babylon. And yes, the Lord knew what was on their minds. The Lord knew the discouragement and disparaging attitude that prevailed regarding the new temple. He addressed it directly.

Haggai 2:3-5 "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, *is this* not in your eyes as nothing? ⁴Yet now **be strong**, Zerubbabel,' says the Lord; 'and **be strong**, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and **be strong**, all you people of the land,' says the Lord, 'and **work**; for **I am with you**,' says the Lord of hosts. ⁵'*According to* the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; **do not fear!**'"

In addressing the lack of physical glory and impressiveness the Lord was making it clear that this didn't matter to the Lord. And it shouldn't be allowed to interfere with carrying out the task the Lord had given them, for it was the Lord that had told them in no uncertain terms that it was high time to be building the temple to the Lord their God, and not simply looking out for themselves and their creature comforts and desires.

However the Lord didn't simply scold. He encouraged. He told them one and all from top down, from the High Priest and governor to the lowliest of citizens, "**Be strong and work!**" He emphasized each party once again, Be strong Zerubbabel! Be strong Joshua! Be strong all you people of the land! And then the Lord added the instruction: "**AND WORK!**" This wasn't just a pep talk telling them: "Buck up, things will get better, don't give up! You have to be strong. When the going gets tough, the tough get going!" He gave them reason to be strong and not give up. He reminded them that He was with them. Remember that was the point of the Feast of Tabernacles, remembering that the Lord is with His people and cares for them in all their needs. Even in the most desperate of times, even when human resources are completely inadequate, the Lord is with you!

Why this message for us today? As we draw near to the end of another church year our attention turns to living in the end times and the work the Lord has given us to do. At times it is discouraging. We have a nice church building. We all know it's no cathedral, and we're ok with that. We know that the size of the building or the beauty of the building isn't important. We know the Lord has told us to build His Church and it's about taking the gospel out into the world and making disciples of all nations. But when we look at the size of our congregation, the shrinking size of our congregation, we can get discouraged. The Lord calls on us to be strong and work. And yes, He calls us out by name. He knows who I am as pastor of this congregation and He tells me to be strong and work! He knows who is chairman and who the other officers are, and the Lord says to you, "Be strong and work!" He looks to the rest of the congregation and says, "Be strong and work!" Why should we be strong? Why should we not be discouraged, but rather work! Because the Lord is with us! Remember Jesus promise, "**I am with you always even to the end**"

of the age!”(Matthew 28:20). The Lord is faithful. He supplies all our need. He strengthens the weak and blesses the work of our hands. Knowing this as true we need not fear. The Lord of hosts is with us and He is a mighty God!

Indeed what the Lord assured the people of Judah was that He would do whatever needed to be done.

II. The Lord Shakes Things Up!

Haggai 2:6-7a “For thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Once more (*it is a little while*) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; ⁷and I will shake all nations.’”

The Lord had shaken things up more than once in world history. In the days of Noah the Lord sent a global flood that brought judgment upon the wicked who refused to worship the Lord. On the other hand the flood served as a great deliverance from evil for Noah and his family, providing for the advancement of God’s covenant will for the Savior to be born into the world.

Again in the days of Moses the Lord shook things up, and brought down a great military power who attempted to thwart the will of God and the advancement of His plan for the salvation of the world. After the tenth plague the Children of Israel were let go from slavery in Egypt to take possession of the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so that the promised Seed could be born there and all the nations of the earth could be blessed.

So the Lord says once more I will shake things up; and the world would be shaken as reported by Daniel regarding the Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Babylon had fallen. The Persian Empire would fall to Greece, and then Alexanders Empire would fall to Rome all in preparation of the coming of the Savior. The Persians let the remnant of the Jews return to Judah. The Greeks would set in place a universal language throughout much of the world. The Romans provided the highways and safe travel conditions for the spread of the gospel. The Lord is good to His Word! He maintains control and blesses His people, and will bring success according to His gracious good will for salvation.

This remains true for us yet today. No matter which party is in control of the White House, or the congress, or what horrible things are going on in distant lands, the Lord still has the ability and the power to shake things up for the advancement of His kingdom, for the blessing of His people, for the growth of His Church. This is our confidence that encourages us when we are feeling down and out. This is exactly why we should not fear but rather be strong and work, and work with confidence, knowing the Lord is with us and --

III. The Lord Provides the Glory of Christ's Church.

Haggai 2: 7b-9 “They shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,” says the Lord of hosts. ⁸ “The silver *is* Mine, and the gold *is* Mine,” says the Lord of hosts. ⁹ “The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,” says the Lord of hosts. “And in this place I will give peace,” says the Lord of hosts.”

Unfortunately we have to deal with a mistranslation in these verses that has led to such a common misunderstanding of our text that the mistranslation has been perpetuated for centuries. The text actually reads “**the desired (or chosen) of all nations shall come.**” This passage has many parallels in the writings of the prophets that speak of how the people of all nations shall be drawn to Christ and to His Church. The temple being built by Zerubbabel and Joshua and the remnant of the Jews some four centuries before Christ would be replaced piece by piece by Herod the Great over a period of forty years. The Lord was speaking of another temple, a spiritual temple made up of living stones, His Church. We read of this temple in Peter's first epistle.

1 Peter 2:4-6 “Coming to Him *as to* a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’”

Jesus, the Stone which the builders rejected is the Cornerstone and the His church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and

Prophets, the truth of the Word of God! Building on this results in a glorious church having no spot or wrinkle. Each of us are living stones placed in this temple. Each of us have been perfected, cleansed, sanctified by Jesus' blood and righteousness. Each of us are fitted into this building, this temple, not as passive stones that are to just sit there, but as living stones that are active in the Church, active in glorifying our Savior God and spreading the good news of salvation. The glory of the New Testament Church as God's dwelling place among men is so far superior to even the brilliant beauty of Solomon's temple that it is an unworthy comparison.

The benefit, the blessing that comes to us is peace. The peace of sins forgiven is not only a peace that soothes our conscience, but one that abides in our hearts. It is the peace that God has declared and established with us; a peace that enters our hearts by the working of the Spirit through the Word.

The Lord has asked us, more than that, the Lord has commissioned us, called us, commanded us to participate in the building of His glorious Temple. We should not let small numbers or setbacks discourage us or allow ourselves to become so disheartened that we fail to do what the Lord has asked and expects of us a His redeemed children. He abides with us, and it is such a wondrous privilege and purpose in life and it is such a glorious Temple. So hear the encouragement of the Lord as He speaks to each of us: "BE STRONG AND WORK AND DO NOT FEAR, FOR I AM WITH YOU!"

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.