

Haggai ch 1:15b – 2:9

Title: Together rebuilding in the present with courage & disappointment.

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Israel's journey is a helpful metaphor for us for the gritty process of rebuilding human lives. Particularly as we consider their return from Exile.

The nation of Israel were slowly returning to the ruins of Jerusalem. This beloved and sacred city (Jerusalem) had been sieged by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in the mid 6th century. Ending in the burning of Solomon's Temple in 586/7 BC.

Now some 40 years later returning, they carried with them the long shadow of war – distant memories of the pre-war glory days, memories of violence – some conscious and some buried, scars, grief, a secondary culture from life in Babylon, and they faced the ruins of a city that was once vibrant and filled with promise.

And they would find the ruin of their homes, mosques, schools and churches after the raging wars.

Returning to ruin in order to rebuild.
Rebuilding on top of a ruin is a hard laborious, discouraging task.

It is to this group of people that this gutsy prophet Haggai spoke – Take courage, he says. To us this might sound Pollyanna advice. But he was leaning into their spiritual heritage. It is the language of beginnings... the courage and strength that is required to forge a new path.

It is the same language that was used for Joshua when he stepped up and succeeded Moses, and was given the task of leading the people into the promised land.

Joshua 1:6ff "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" "As I was with Moses so I will be with you" "Have I not commanded you, be strong and courageous"

And again this language is used when Solomon succeeded David and was given the task of building the first Temple.

In 1 Chronicles chapter 28 we read David said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished."

“Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary. Be strong and do the work.”

People around us are rebuilding their lives day by day, one little step by little step. Someone with depression who smiles. A new immigrant to Canada, figures out how to apply for their work permit in a second language. The courage to be is a sign of God’s Spirit renewing humanity little step by little step.

And the people whom Haggai address were not only called to build their own homes for their families but to also focus on the place of their collective faith and spirituality – the temple.

And to inspire them, Haggai invites them to consider some questions for reflection. I have found these questions filled with wisdom.

Question 1: Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory?

There were few among them who had actually been in the original temple. Yet they had all heard stories of the hayday or glory days of the temple. Stories of greatness - the majesty of that place!

The gold-plated interior, Israel’s glory days. Legacy lives on and is most often exaggerated through collective memory and oral tradition.

These are the days that tend to overshadow our present now. The ones we compare everything to. And leave us constantly feeling disappointment.

Our human minds escape to the ‘glory days’ often to avoid the pain of the present.

So, Haggai’s next questions uncover this...

Question 2: How does it look to you now?

Question 3: Is it not in your sight as nothing?

I really appreciate these questions. Because they give room to pause.

Space to acknowledge and name: discouragement... disappointment.... pain, hidden comparisons...

neighborhoods, church community, work colleagues, family... each group is an evolving organism of humans that will always disappoint us.

The hidden emotional movements of culture shock and grief are not linear. We experience them more slowly, and in waves. And we need to make space for them.

Moving on to the new too quickly without expressing the reality of the chaos and ruin, leaves little space for Spirit transformation.

And then somehow, in the mystery of it all, the first step becomes visible.

So, as we think about the task before us in our lives, in this community, in our neighborhood and our world...

I wonder, how do we begin to rebuild?

I invite a moment of pause and then your brief comments.