

Haggai 1:1-15

"Doing the Work of the Lord."

Have you ever had a job where you needed to do your work in a timely manner and it did not matter what happened in the periphery, but you still needed to get that work done on time? I think we can all relate to that statement in some form or other. I have had jobs where it did not matter what happened I was under pressure to get tasks done. From working in the Bishop's office to working at the oil refinery back home, I always had to work under deadlines and under pressure.

In our spiritual ancestor's past, they often faced deadlines as well. Sometimes the deadlines were imposed by rulers or by God himself, but there were pressures to get things done. Today in our reading from the book of Haggai, we see a prophet who was speaking on God's behalf giving motivation and a deadline to get things done so that the people of Israel could fully worship their God in the right manner.

Haggai had a very short prophetic career. He was speaking to the Israelites after the Babylonian exile. What had occurred is that the Babylonians, who had pulled many Israelites from their homeland in their conquest of the territory, were conquered by the Persians. This is the famous moment in our history when it was perceived that the Persian king Cyrus was seen as a messiah for conquering the Babylonians and allowing the Israelites to return to their homeland.

Haggai came onto the scene after Darius, the son of Cyrus, came to power in the Persian empire. The Israelites had returned to their home, but they had not gone back to their old way of living. The Israelites were still recovering from having their whole society uprooted by the Babylonians. There was a lot of confusion amongst the people as to what they should do with their lives and this new freedom that they had in the Persian empire.

The Israelites in this time in their history were in need of direction. They had returned to their home, but they were unsure of what to do, especially in matters of faith. Haggai spoke out that the people needed to rebuild their temple to worship God. It was time that they returned to their faith of old and to begin the process of rebuilding the temple.

This in some ways was a bit of a hard sell for the Israelites. Haggai was calling them out, for they had turned to their own houses before they had turned the temple. The people seemed to have forgotten that it was understood that God had sent Cyrus into Babylon to free the Israelites from captivity. They had forgotten who had been at work in their freedom. They had forgotten the direction that they needed to go in after they had returned home.

I'll be honest in this situation, I'm not sure if I would have rebuilt the temple first thing. I think it is understandable that folks would have wanted to build their own houses first and get settled. But the priority after all of that should have been on God. It was time to do their work for the Lord. It was time to restore the temple so that the people would have a place to honor God and a place to remember all of the good things that God had done for them.

I believe that there are times in our lives that we need to turn to God and make sure that what we do honors God. When I was thinking of times when I needed to focus on the work of God, I really didn't have to think too far back. I just have to look at the past year here in ministry and think about the times I was in need of focus myself.

I remember when I first started here at the church, I received a note from my grandmother in Arkansas. I was simply concerned starting a new position that I might not be able to really pull through here at the church. In fact, if you remember from the from last August's board meeting my main goal was survival. Hearing this, my grandmother sent a note affirming where I was and that I should keep my focus on doing the work of the Lord and things would

work out from there. I must say, that simple bit of advice was needed and helpful. It was a little bit of focus that I needed in order to keep on task and make it to where I am today with you all.

However, in all of this, I struggle with keeping the focus on God. In the midst of my life, trying to get married, being a student, being a family member, I am highly sympathetic when it comes to struggling keeping the focus on God. In the midst of writing this sermon, I was distracted by the lovely weather and wishing I was out at Frontier Days, rather than sitting in my hot house in front of a computer. We all face distractions when it comes to God. It's natural that we would lose our focus on God.

We have the consolation that in all of this, we don't have despair or feel that we are inadequate in our faith. In fact, as the story we have from Haggai telling us, we are not the first people to struggle with doing the work of God. Haggai was there to bring the people back into focus. Much like many of the prophets we have studied, the prophets were there to bring the people back into focus.

I believe that is what is truly important in all of this is our faith. I believe that we are called to a faith that keeps God and Christ in the centrality of all that we do. I believe that we will struggle with this, for we are all prone to failure as human beings. But we have the Word of God as a source of strength and reminder of when we feel that we are losing focus. We are not in a position where we have to constantly despair in our situation or lack of faith.

Recognizing our own weakness in this matter opens us up for the love of Christ to work within us. Knowing that we are weak we actually open ourselves up to allowing the Holy Spirit to work within us, so that we can accomplish the work of Christ here in this world. In our weakness we are given an opportunity to be an instrument of God's work.

There is something great in that recognition of weakness. As believers we know that we come to our God as a person in need of God's grace, that is why we come to Christ. We see the darkness of the world and the need for ourselves to be made more perfect, so we turn to Christ in order to seek out the light. Turning our back against the world, and all of its hardships and recognizing how much we need Christ is an act of faith. Again, we allow Christ to come into us and we in our broken state can allow the grace of God to work within us as we work towards a world that would know the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

I look to a story of healing for how powerful faith can be. In Matthew Christ is moving towards healing a girl when a woman reaches out and touches Christ. She believes that if she touches Jesus's cloak she will be made well. Yet Christ tells her that her faith in him is what would make her well, and she was well. It is through faith that we can experience a great transformation in our lives and be made whole.

I believe that this moment of healing goes beyond that of faith in Christ. It's a faith that recognizes your own weakness and failings, yet putting complete and utter trust in Jesus Christ. If we were perfect then we would be a people that would not need faith, but we are a people that need faith in order to live our lives completely. I believe that a strong faith not only gives us strength in our daily lives, but it gives the opportunity for hope.

Going back to the act of doing the work of the Lord, not only do we restore things such as confidence in ourselves to do work that transcends us, we gain the opportunity to witness hope. I believe that in ministry with others we can be witness to the great hope that can be seen in the help of others. Doing the work of the Lord calls us to look beyond ourselves and into the eyes of other people. Many people are in need of hope.

So what does the work of the Lord look like in our day? We don't necessarily need to build temples, but we can do acts that can go beyond us. I think much of the work we do with collecting food for organizations, supporting missionaries in their work with people who need the gospel, and assisting where we can lend a hand in the community is doing the work of the Lord. Being committed to your family, being committed to your church, being committed to Christ above all is doing the work of the Lord. Praying earnestly for others in their time of need is doing the work of the Lord. All of these actions bring God in to focus in our lives and gives us the opportunity to be messengers of Christ and of hope to the world.

It is my prayer that this congregation can take the words of Haggai and be a people that seek to do the work of the Lord. In the words of the ancient prophet, here these words and think about how we can be a part of the greater faith story that continues from the time of these words, to today.

Read Haggai 2:1-9

The future is strong in the Lord. Let us focus on doing the work of the Lord our God, the work of the Son Jesus Christ, and may we be filled with the Holy Spirit now and always. Amen.