

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 Sheatiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Hehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, Who is left among you that saw the 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.

“Speaking Truth To Power”

While sleeping soundly in the quiet little town of Wenonah last Saturday, I was suddenly awakened by a sound that I hadn't heard in years. It was a siren, stealing peace from the night, with its red alert of danger. Startled, I laid there wondering what kind of danger it was signaling. Must be a fire, my head told my racing heart. Gladly, as soon as I associated fire with the siren, my pounding heart automatically calmed. Later, I smiled when I realized why . . . The sound of the siren had evoked a memory of my good 'ole days growing up in the New England town of Plymouth, Ct. There, whenever the siren sounded it was a call to all fire and rescue volunteers to get up out of bed and get to work. Back then, no one was paid for doing their duty of keeping the community safe and sound.

As I laid there listening to the screeching siren, I found comfort in remembering the dedicated service of EMT's John and my brother Jeff . . . and Mr. Hoebel, a life-long member of the Plymouth Fire Department. I still remember the time when Mr. Hoebel recruited every able bodied resident of Lake Plymouth to help fight a fire that was creeping over the mountain with threatening force towards our homes. All hands on deck was the call---and a huge number of residents responded.

Since I was around 10 years old and inexperienced at fire fighting, I didn't think that the call included me. But much to my surprise, Mr. Hoebel said to us kids . . . “If you want, grab a shovel, and help me.” So I did. I worked hard throwing dirt on little flames; cautiously walking on rocks; and, staying off the heated forest floor. By the day's end, victory was ours. The fire was out and I'll always remember how I felt invincible, courageous, and skillfully competent. I'll also never forget how easily my bubble of greatness was burst when we paused to rest at the end of the day and my friends started to laugh at me as I was perched one-legged on a rock while playfully swinging my other. When the reason for their laughter was clarified by Mr. Hoebel's voice of warning: “Watch out---there's a fire under your foot!” I was humiliated by my lack of

awareness and apparent lack of fire fighting expertise. Oddly enough, the wounding word of warning to my ego, both destroyed and saved my sense of self. Even though the truth hurt, Mr. Hoebel's word of warning made me realize that somebody with far greater power than me had my back.

According to the prophet Haggi: In the second year of King Darius, in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month . . . the call came from the Lord to the high priests, governing agents, and the Jewish religious remnant in Jerusalem to take on the impossible task of re- building Yahweh's temple. The task was a formidable one. The former temple was totaled. The people lacked the skills and resources needed for the rebuilding. They had little money to dedicate to the restoration. Their prideful spirit was deflated and sorely lacking in confidence.

According to the prophet Haggi, the Lord summoned him to speak God's truth to these powers by speaking words of faith that could overcome their fears of inadequacy and actual depletion of power.

Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel,
take courage, O Joshua,
take courage all you people of the land.
Work --- because I am with you, according to the promise
that I made you when you came out of Egypt.
My spirit abides among you; do not fear.

Courage would come through faith in the abiding presence of God as an antidote for fear. The will for re-building would be based on faith in the covenantal promises of God for bringing new life to the community. The economic resources needed for the completion of the temple to the glory of God would be secured through faith in the prophetic word of judgment from the Lord

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 hosts.

The silver is mine and the gold is mine, says the Lord.

Ouch. Here Haggai reminds the down and out people of the reason that the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem had fallen in the first place. The people had broken covenant with Yahweh and sinned. They had fallen short of the glory of God. They had taken the riches of God for themselves and not shared the wealth with all God's people. Greed, graft, injustice, usury, and corruption had killed mercy and love in God's temple of Holiness, and had wiped out compassionate care from the hearts of God's people.

But the promise of the prophetic word is that even when it wounds our pride, deflates our ego, gets us angry, and threatens our self esteem, God's word that speaks truth to power also graces us with the strength of the Holy Spirit for accomplishing the life giving work of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord of hosts;
The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former,
and in this place I will give prosperity.

Let us pray. Creator God, we thank you for your promise that as we attend to the daily business of re-building the temple of our body and mind, and this house as a sanctuary where you abide in glory . . . you will grace us with your Word that speaks Truth to any power that would diminish our ability to love fully and live joyfully. In Jesus' name we pray: God with us, God for us, God against us. Amen