

*The message was prepared by Rev. Pamela Graf Short for the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church for September twenty-ninth, the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost in the year of our LORD two thousand and nineteen.*

## Haggai 2:1-9

**1** 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: **2** 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, **3** 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? **4** 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, **5** according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. **6** 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; **7** 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. **8** The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. **9** 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.

**O**ur Bible story for today pits  
lethargy against courage;  
rubble against splendor;  
and our point of view against God's perspective.

It can be seen as a story about worship  
and it can be seen as a story about work.

This story would likely be completely unknown to us, if not for the music of Handel who connects this story with the coming of Jesus.

Indeed scholars say that the reason Haggai was so concerned about the rebuilding of the temple, was because he anticipated the coming of the Messiah in his own day.

Well, his own day was the second year of the reign of Darius, the King of Persia, and it took God another 520 years before Jesus appeared.

Haggai is a bit of a chicken and egg story.

In chapter one we are told that the people's crops are failing and they do not have sufficient water or clothing. Who in this situation has time or money to build a worship space?

Haggai says however, that your crops are failing because you haven't built a worship space, because you are not worshipping;

you are indifferent;

distracted;

discouraged;

downcast;

disheartened;

dismayed.

You are sitting in the midst of the rubble of former generations and you are kind of paralyzed; not even sure where to begin.

A part of the story of the Jewish people goes like this:  
They are a small people;  
at times seen by others as a weak people;  
and certainly by many in Haggai's day as an insignificant people.

## So what's the big deal? Let us alone!

Here's the deal:

the smallest of nations has the largest of gods.

This little people tucked along the bank of the Jordan, the lowest river on earth,  
has a God who holds the entire cosmos in hands which at any moment can give a little shake and  
the treasures of the earth will come tumbling out like flour through a sieve;  
or champagne over a bottle;  
or toys from a basket.

Remember you have a God who shook loose the chains of the Egyptians,  
a God of splendor and glory  
whose Spirit abides right here. Right here.

Three times Haggai says  
"take courage" "take courage" "take courage".

Our courage does not come  
from a good harvest  
or a bull market  
or from walled borders  
or cyber security  
or oil wells  
or wind mills  
or prison cells  
or nuclear arsenals  
or peach colored faces  
or camouflaged colored clothes.

Our courage comes from the presence of God;  
the God who opens the skies and stirs up the sea;  
the God who commands angels  
and places metals in mountains;  
If God can, with a single word make light appear, what do you think God can do when God's hands shake?

I don't often put together the words "courage" and "worship"; and when I do, I suppose I think first of the  
courage to worship for people in places where persecution is a true and constant threat.  
In this story, the persecution has long since passed, but the rubble remains and the burnt out worship space a  
constant reminder of life gone bad.

Our memories play tricks on us, you know.  
They tell us "what was is what will be".

But through Haggai God calls us to remember rightly.  
Remember what belongs and to whom.  
The gold and the silver are mine;  
the treasures of the nations are mine.  
Why do you think I delivered you from Egypt,  
except that you are mine and I am yours.  
When you remember that;  
when you recall the truth about who I am,  
you will have no need to be afraid.  
My presence will give you courage.

And so in the story the association between courage and worship is not that we need courage in order to worship, but that we need worship in order to bring courage.

That is, when we stop for a moment and remember that God is with us;  
when we recall that the God who spins the planets and forms the whale's fin is the same God who swirls around us and formed our community;  
when we realize that the rubble of our own relationships does not compare with the splendor of God's love for us;  
when we pause for a moment and listen for the rattle of God's shaking  
and look for the treasures of God's grace;  
when we stop and tell God,  
"Thank you for being here";  
Then we will receive the splendid courage of the Holy Spirit.

Worship and courage.  
Courage and worship.

I really like this combination of words:  
When worship leads to courage,  
surely courage will lead us back to worship.

When we meet God in holy spaces and hear God's word for us,  
we are given the courage to act when other stand still;  
to speak when others fall mute;  
to help when other stand by with indifference or amusement.

When we muster up courage to help, to speak, to act, when we believe that God is with us  
and God's angels surround us,  
then surely our acts of courage will motivate us to return to worship and give thanks for God's presence;  
for God's help.

Worship and courage.  
Courage and worship.

The school year is all geared up. You're showin' up!  
Now what about the worship year?

In most cultures across the ages and around the world worship is a constant part of community life;  
Not something on the edges, but in the center.  
sometimes it comes as an emotional response to something people feel in their souls;  
sometimes it comes from a response to nature,  
a desire to give thanks for what is all around us;  
sometimes it comes from a love song passed down from one generation to the next;  
sometimes it comes from an encounter with God that cannot be denied, but must be shared and celebrated and  
honored and remembered;  
sometimes it comes from a place of extreme hardship,  
a need to be held by God when nothing else is holding.

Worship and courage.  
Courage and worship.

From whence does your worship come?  
Do you need God to hold you today?  
Did you come to remember the cross and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus?  
To sing “Jesus love me” and to know it is true, really true?  
Did you come to the realization that the life you have is not of your own making, but a gift from God and so  
you came to say “Thank you”?  
Did you feel an emotional pull from the Holy Spirit to say today is a day to believe that God is?

Worship and courage.  
Courage and worship.

It has been said that worship is like a meal;  
like eating your Wheaties.  
Everybody knows if you want to be a champion, you eat your Wheaties.  
They don’t look like much;  
they don’t even taste like much,  
but tucked inside those little flakes is the nourishment you need for victory.

I don’t know what challenges you will face in the coming year.  
I don’t know where strength will be needed or courage will be called for,  
but I do know that centering your life around the worship of Jesus Christ,  
stopping to say “thank you”,  
meeting for one hour a week with the God who is ready to shake loose heaven and earth on your behalf will  
fortify you with courage.

Worship and courage.  
Courage and worship.

So now take courage, Tontogany.  
Take courage, children of Mrs. Amos  
Take courage all you people of Otsego  
For the LORD of angel armies says  
“I am with you.”  
“I am with you.”  
“I am with you.”

Now may our God who is ready to shake the heaven and the earth,  
the seas, the dry lands and the nations on your behalf  
Fortify you with honor  
Bolster you with kindness  
And strengthen you with  
Courage, compassion, joy and peace  
Now and for a thousand generations  
Amen

