

Prayer of Preparation: *I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together! All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church together! The church is not a building; the church is not a steple; the church is not a resting place; the church is a people.*

Like many prophets Haggai asks us to do something that may seem difficult: look in three directions at one time. Prophets call us to take a look at the past, the present, and see into the future... through our eyes and through God's intentions. It is not an easy task, but it is possible.

Haggai says it's time to rebuild; look back and remember the temple of the past, look around and see the temple right now, and look toward the future temple that has been restored to its former glory. Here's what he said, *"Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?"*

Which one of you remembers the temple in all its glory? Do you remember how wonderful it used to be, how well it was maintained, how the temple was a place worthy to glorify God? Haggai is employing a bit of psychology to tell his people that if they work together they can rebuild the temple; they can restore the temple to what it used to be...and perhaps they can even make it better.

Haggai goes on to say, *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.*

But Haggai is talking about God's people as well. In many ways, the ancient Israelites believed that the temple was God's presence in their midst so when the temple was destroyed, God had left the people.

Listen to what Haggai says to the governor with a fresh ear, where's the glory of the temple...don't you remember it? The temple has been destroyed and all that's left are the memories of what it used to be, but Haggai has a message for his people... *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.*

My spirit abides among you; do not fear...when the temple that represents God's presence among them has been reduced to a pile of rocks, Haggai reminds them that God is with them. God never left them. That God does not reside in stone...That God resides in God's people. We tend to look at our present circumstances and think that all is lost. But all is not lost. Haggai reminds us that God's spirit abides among **us**; God's people.

God is here. God is always and ever with us. Even when life doesn't go the way we want it to go...God is with us. In the very best of times...God is with us. In our very worst times...God is with us. In all the times in between...God is with us. God does not reside in a pile of stones...God resides with us. Haggai reminds us of God's promise to God's own people, *for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt.*

Here's our future, says Haggai, the latter splendor of God's house will be greater than the future...we will rebuild **the building and the people** and in the rebuilding we will build better.

Here's where Haggai points us to the future: when the temple is rebuilt it only becomes the temple when the people of God are in it. You ever wonder why I am always insistent that we actually **use** the building...it's because God abides with us and in us. God is here when God's people are here.

God is here when we worship. God is here when we serve the community. God is here when we study. God is here when we sing. God is here when we pray. God is here when we are here. God doesn't exist in the brick and mortar...God abides in us. Dare I say, we are the church?

Haggai reminds us of who we are...and what we are called to do. We are called to be the church, God's people in all of God's glory to everyone who sees and hears us.

Response to the Word: *And when the people gather, there's singing and there's praying; there's laughing and there's crying sometimes, all of it saying: I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together! All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church together!*