

The President-elect is taking time off after a hard-fought political campaign. Walking in the sand along the beach, a bottle washes ashore. Upon opening it, a weathered, worn-out, beaten-down Genie comes out. Okay, look, I'm tired and I'm weak so I can grant you only one wish. What do you wish for? The President-elect thinks for a moment, "I pray for World Peace. Give me that."

Genie says, "That's too hard, give me something easier."

President-elect offers this option, "Make my spouse into the most beautiful person in the world."

Genie, "World peace it is."

The Book of Haggai is the shortest book in the Old Testament, next to Obadiah. Perhaps because of its length, we don't preach too often from this book. It is usually cited when a church is in the midst of a new building program. Haggai was a prophet who encouraged the returning Jewish exiles to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple, 50 years after its original destruction in 586 BCE. Haggai presented a message of hope grounded in the hard reality of a destroyed land, Temple and its people.

We have many returning winter residents and are so grateful for your safe return. Some of you, including year-round residents, are wondering how is our church doing. Pastor Diane and me hear members say something along the lines of,

“This place is going to be okay. We’ll get through this somehow, some way.” They are hopeful of our future. I am too, but, I’m not sure the way God will lead us.

How have we been **“rebuilding”** ourselves since the death of our Senior Pastor, Larry DeLong? We are heading towards a building program, a reshaping or re-visioning, if you will, but it’s still early! Very early. **We are not afraid to go forward, but the way forward isn’t clear, yet.** General Douglas MacArthur is quoted as saying, **“We are not retreating – we are advancing in another direction.”**

That goes for our church today – Take courage; Be strong. God says he is with us and his Spirit abides in us – therefore do not be afraid. The task before us is rebuilding – moving VPC forward into its future, even if it seems impossible. How do we do that? One thing we read in this passage is that God shakes up everything. God sifts the dust of disaster so that it settles to the ground. Rebuilding the future begins to be shaped out of the rubble of the shake, rattle and roll of imminent change.

Haggai began preaching around 520 BCE. The Jewish exiles had been back nearly 20 years -- the Temple had been rebuilt, but they were unhappy. They complained about those who had not gone into exile but stayed behind and took the land away from the Jewish people. And they were dissatisfied with the newly

rebuilt Temple. They felt God had abandoned them during the 70 years in exile and when their Temple was destroyed.

They were angry at God over their suffering. They found excuses for not doing God's work. Their anger caused them to be lazy and uninspired over the rebuilding effort, "Is it not in your sight as nothing? Haggai is saying to them, "the rebuilding, so far, doesn't look like much yet." And so he tries to move them beyond their lethargic position.

In our nation there are people disinterested in the country's well-being; people disinterested in their neighbor's well-being. We, as a nation, all too quickly dismiss other people's point-of-view. Our nation appears lazy; sometimes we don't care about our own well-being.

Change in any church always faces opposition. Things move too slow for some people and too fast for others. We may feel *angry, depressed and lethargic* about participation in the life of this church, while in the midst of our own devastation! In fact, we've had more than enough of that shake, rattle and roll. We are feeling it, God! We are feeling it!

**And sometimes it knocks the breath right out of us.**

Having spent most of my life in Southern California I know about Shake, Rattle and Roll. I experienced plenty of earthquakes in my lifetime and I've been shaken, and rattled and a couple times actually rolled out of bed. My memory says

this, **“It’s uncomfortable! It’s frightening!”** And in the midst of it, I always asked myself, **“What’s coming next?”**

**Isn’t that the very thing we are asking ourselves today at VPC?**

And how ironic, that we, in 2016, have this in common with the Israelites from 2500 years ago. What **they** were rebuilding, and what **we** are rebuilding, is not a house of God, but the bigger picture of *doing the work of God*. Buildings are great and important, but doing God’s work is what this scripture is about. What are the ways in which we can rebuild and renew the work of God here?

First, we have to reject a negative spirit. We have to reject pessimism and despair and be open to the help Haggai suggests. We need God. We need to remember that the highest heaven cannot contain our Living God and neither can any house of worship built with human hands. But, when progress is slow, pessimism sets in and people who don’t see any concrete steps taken begin to wonder, “Will anything change?”

Haggai repeatedly says, “Take courage/Be strong!” That’s good news for our soul to hear when we’re downtrodden – encouraging words to propel us to move forward – to get on with the work of God because God promises, “I am with you.” We need to hear that “*with.*” I am *with* you. We are not alone. God’s very character is to be *with* us. Without God’s presence we lose strength and vitality for doing the Lord’s work.

Second, we must stay connected to God in order to do God's work. That's why we worship together, pray together, do Bible Study together, and fellowship together. God's presence with his people was not a spur of the moment thing. It happened constantly, when the Israelites came out of Egypt and it's happening here. God has said, over 50 times in the bible, "I will be your God, you shall be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of you."

I believe we can never hear this promise enough. God never, ever, ever, leaves us alone. We must stay connected to God!

And third, God provides his Spirit for us. There should be no fear, because the Holy Spirit remains active amongst us, in spite of the circumstances we find ourselves in. Haggai's words are comforting and assuring to the people about God's presence. If I know, deep within me, that God is in control, that God is here, and that God has not abandoned me, then I am not afraid – I am strong and not weak – I am comforted and not frustrated. And I know that I (we) can move forward into an unknown future.

And friends, the future belongs to God! God will act and reorder all things – there will be a divine Shake, Rattle and Roll – in an extraordinary way. This is to **Shake** that which is changeable; **Rattle** that which is temporary and replace it with the eternal. What we are striving for is **that which cannot be shaken** – so that God's eternal truth remains – God will not leave us alone – God is with us.

One last thing I want to talk about today is money\$. I've been asked to ask you for "Da money!" as we begin our stewardship campaign. You should have received by now our Stewardship letter from Pastor Diane and me and a pledge card. As we read in scripture, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts." Our wealth comes from God. The wealth of the world belongs to God. The nation's treasure belongs to God. We are entrusted with God's wealth. Let us give lavishly on our service to our Lord. Because.... the Lord says,

"I will fill this Temple with glory/with splendor." Even though we have suffered; even though we have forgotten God's promises; even when we are lethargic and stuck in our sins; God says to us – I will shake it all up – heaven and earth. I will fill this house with splendor and it shall be greater than the splendor for you had before, for I will give you prosperity.

We live in an age of great skepticism and disbelief. Let us embrace this message hope and abundance for our church. God is with us! Hallelujah! Amen.