PENTECOST 22

Proper 27 - Year C

*This Bible study was written by **Melissa Howell** for Proper 27 (C) in 2019.*

Haggai 1:15b-2:9

In the second year of King Darius, **2** [1] 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 who 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 will 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."

Commentary from Melissa Howell

It is helpful to read all of chapter 1 of the book of Haggai through 2:9 to obtain a fuller sense of what is going on in this passage. Haggai was a prophet who urged the leaders of Judah and the Judean people to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The text itself, in verse 1:15, shares that the book was written in the year 520 BCE, during the second year of the reign of the Persian emperor Darius I. This dating tells us that it had been 19 years since the Judean people returned from their Babylonian exile. Since their return, they apparently have been building their own houses while neglecting to rebuild the Lord's house, the Temple (Haggai 1:9), which was destroyed in 587 BCE.

The community listens to the divine command from Haggai and obeys—they do indeed begin to rebuild the Temple. Our passage for today is God's response to the obedience and faithfulness of the Judean people in following the Lord's command. God reminds the people that although the Temple has been destroyed and rebuilding it will be difficult, God's presence with them is steadfast, as it always has been, even through times of great difficulty, like their exiles in Egypt and in Babylon. "My spirit abides among you," God tells the people, "do not fear" (Haggai 2:5, NRSV). "Splendor" and "prosperity" will be God's gifts to the people (Haggai 2:9).

Discussion Questions

What difficult tasks do you hear God asking of us in our communities today? What is hard about this work?

What do you envision as the gift or the "splendor" (Haggai 2:9) that could come as a result of this work?

Psalm 98

[1] Sing to the Lord a new song, *
for he has done marvelous things.
[2] With his right hand and his holy arm *
has he won for himself the victory.
[3] The Lord has made known his victory; *
his righteousness has he openly shown in the sight of the nations.
[4] He remembers his mercy and faithfulness to the house of Israel, *
and all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.
[5] Shout with joy to the Lord, all you lands; *
lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing.
[6] Sing to the Lord with the harp, *
with the harp and the voice of song.
[7] With trumpets and the sound of the horn *
shout with joy before the King, the Lord.
[8] Let the sea make a noise and all that is in it, *
the lands and those who dwell therein.
[9] Let the rivers clap their hands, *
and let the hills ring out with joy before the Lord,
when he comes to judge the earth.
[10] In righteousness shall he judge the world *
and the peoples with equity.

Commentary from Melissa Howell

In this song of praise, the people of Israel remember the great things the Lord has done for them and are also happy that the other peoples of the world have witnessed these divine acts of "righteousness," "mercy," and "faithfulness" (verses 3-4). The psalmist urges all people to "shout" and "sing" to the Lord (verses 5-6), and the psalmist even calls on nature itself, the "sea," "rivers," and "hills," to join in the praise of their Creator (verses 8-9).

Discussion Questions

How do you express gratitude to God? How have you witnessed others give thanks to God?

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

2 As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our
being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers
and sisters, [2] not to be quickly shaken in mind or
alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as
though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord
is already here. [3] Let no one deceive you in any way,
for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes
first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined
for destruction. [4] He opposes and exalts himself
above every so-called god or object of worship, so
that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring
himself to be God. [5] Do you not remember that I told
you these things when I was still with you?

[13] But we must always give thanks to God for you,
brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because
God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through
sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the
truth. [14] For this purpose he called you through our
gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord
Jesus Christ. [15] So then, brothers and sisters, stand
firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were
taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our
letter.

[16] Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God
our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us
eternal comfort and good hope, [17] comfort your hearts
and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Commentary from Melissa Howell

As we approach the season of Advent, which focuses on the coming of Christ (both his return and his incarnation), our Sunday readings begin to turn toward these themes as well. Here, the writer of the second letter to the Thessalonians (there is scholarly disagreement as to whether Paul wrote the letter or not) warns the community to beware of false teachings regarding the time when Christ will return and encourages them to hold fast to what they have been previously taught by the writer. Verses 3-5 describe the writer's predictions about what must come first before Christ returns. Biblical scholars are not sure who "the lawless one" in verse 3 refers to—perhaps it was a Roman emperor or a false teacher. These kinds of prophecies or predictions are common in apocalyptic texts (texts that reveal a divine reality after the end of this reality) and eschatological texts (texts that focus on issues of divine judgment and human salvation). Historically, apocalypticism has been a coping mechanism and a source of deep hope for many people. Christian apocalyptic and eschatological texts like this passage declare that although things may be bad now, although there is suffering, it is temporary. God has given the Thessalonians the gifts of grace and sanctification through the Holy Spirit, and so they have "eternal comfort and good hope" (2 Thess., 2:16) in the resurrection and eventual return of Christ.

Discussion Questions

What does the promise of Christ's return mean to you? What is difficult or scary about Christ's return? What is joyful or hopeful about it?

Luke 20:27-38

[27] Some Sadducees, those who say there is no
resurrection, came to him [28] and asked him a question:
"Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother
dies leaving a wife but no children, the man shall
marry the widow and raise up children for his
brother. [29] Now there were seven brothers; the first
married a woman and died childless; [30] then the
second [31] and the third married her, and so in the
same way all seven died childless. [32] Finally the woman
also died. [33] In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife
will the woman be? For the seven had married her."

[34] Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age
marry and are given in marriage, [35] but those who are
considered worthy of a place in that age and in the
resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are
given in marriage. [36] Indeed, they cannot die anymore,
because they are like angels and are children of God,
being children of the resurrection. [37] And the fact that
the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the
story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God
of Jacob. [38] Now he is God not of the dead but of the
living, for to him all of them are alive."

Commentary from Melissa Howell

There were many ways to be Jewish during the time Jesus lived and the time the New Testament scriptures were written, just as today there are many ways to be Christian (for example, Roman Catholic and Protestant). Discussion and debate between Jewish groups were common. In Jesus' time, Sadducees were Jews associated with the elite priestly class of Jerusalem, while the Pharisees were Jews associated with a rabbinic, or teaching, model of Judaism. It is important to remember that Jesus himself was a Jew, so when he criticizes one or both groups, as he does throughout the Gospel of Luke, he is engaging in the tradition of intra-Jewish dialogue and critique.

Here Jesus responds to a question from the Sadducees about the resurrection. It was customary at the time for a brother to marry the widow of his brother, to ensure the woman and her children would be cared for. The Sadducees ask Jesus how such marriages will be understood in the resurrection. Jesus answers that such things do not apply in the resurrection, since those resurrected "are like angels and are children of God" (Luke 20:36), and angels do not marry. In verses 37-38, Jesus uses the example of Exodus 3:6, where God says to Moses, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," to show that God thinks of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as alive, even though their earthly lives have ended. Therefore, Jesus concludes, not only is the earthly institution of marriage a non-issue in the resurrection, even death becomes a non-issue, since to God, the resurrected are among the living.

Discussion Questions

Jesus turns some of our own commonly-held ideas about marriage and death on their heads in this passage. What is difficult for you about this passage? What is comforting for you?

How does this teaching relate to your own ideas or hopes about the resurrection?