



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for August 1, 2021**  
**“Majoring in the Minors: Encouragement”**  
**Speakers: Pastors Tom Grieb & Ashlee Adkins**  
**Scripture: Haggai 1:2-11, Zechariah 9:9-13**

## **Introduction and Context**

There have been a lot of great partners down through the years—Laurel and Hardy, Batman and Robin, Snoopy and Charlie, Lebron and AD, well sort of.

Today, two prophets, same purpose, partners if you will. That’s the story of Haggai and Zechariah. One prophesied over three and a half months, the other over a lifetime.

There are some important dates to remember:

- 586 B.C. The fall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and some 50,000 dashed off to exile in Babylon.
- 538 B.C. A decree by the Persian King, Cyrus releasing the Jews from exile.
- 520 B.C. Haggai and Zechariah begin to preach.
- 516 B.C. The temple is re-built.

It is the re-building of the temple that becomes the focus of both prophets. They call upon the people to get to it. They seek to arouse them from their lethargy and get to work. You get a sense of that in the first of two scriptures we will be reading today. Let’s hear then Haggai 1:2-11.

*This is what the LORD Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house.’”*

*Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”*

*Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”*

*This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the LORD. “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home I blew away. Why?” declares the LORD Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”*

## Encouragement

Both Haggai and Zechariah **encouraged** the people to get with it. God was now acting to lift Judah out of the doldrums. They had sure been through it. They had been kicked around for the better part of a century.

No wonder they were preoccupied with themselves. In the end, self-pity gets us nowhere.

The **encouragement** to re-build the temple was essentially a call to obedience. If anything, the rebuilding the temple would get them working together and would serve to re-invigorate them spiritually. It's funny how obedience leads to renewal spiritually.

These days were all in need of some **encouragement**. It's been all too easy these past months to have lost focus. In some ways it feels like we have been exiled as well, separated from the life we had grown accustomed to.

God stands to **encourage** us. God is still at work. He always has been, no matter how tough things are or have been. God is still sovereign. He still loves us. He is constantly bringing about his good purposes for our lives.

I don't know about you, but that encourages me to no end.

## Identity

What Haggai and Zechariah preached was more than some building program. They were essentially calling on the people to regain their identity as God's people. In the mix of all they had been through they had lost that identity.

The prevailing thought before the exile was that God would never allow Jerusalem to fall. After all, the very abode of God was thought to be in the Holy of Holies in the temple.

When the temple was destroyed, God's people were left to wonder about God's sovereignty. They had to re-think somethings about themselves and about God. They wondered if God would even be where they were going. *"How shall we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?"* Psalm 137:4

In the midst of the exile, God was still with them and was still at work. They didn't so much notice it though.

Upon their return from the exile, the challenge of Haggai and Zechariah not only put their focus on the re-building of the temple, but upon re-building their lives spiritually.

In the end, that's the very place God wants us to be. There is so much in this life that vies for our attention and draws our focus away from God. When that happens, we lose a sense of who we are and, more importantly, whose we are.

Our two prophets were all about building—literally and figuratively. They were all about re-building the temple, but even more so, building lives wholly dedicated to God.

## The Coming Messiah

In the mix of everything the prophets preached, they talked a good deal about the Messiah to come. These are later prophesies and people were becoming highly expectant of the One who was to come.

Zechariah, in particular talks about the Messiah coming in all humility. He talks about the Messiah's reign which will bring peace to the nations.

We read about that in the second of the two passages we have listed for today. From Zechariah 9:9-13 we read:

### **Zechariah 9:9-13**

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!*

*Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!*

*See, your king comes to you,*

*righteous and victorious,*

*lowly and riding on a donkey,*

*on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

*I will take away the chariots from Ephraim*

*and the warhorses from Jerusalem,*

*and the battle bow will be broken.*

*He will proclaim peace to the nations.*

*His rule will extend from sea to sea*

*and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

*As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,*

*I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.*

*Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope;*

*even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.*

*I will bend Judah as I bend my bow*

*and fill it with Ephraim.*

*I will rouse your sons, Zion,*

*against your sons, Greece,*

*and make you like a warrior's sword.*

It's interesting that these two who were so focused on the re-building of the temple in Jerusalem would be even more focused on the reign of the Promise One of God. They were very much convinced of God's sovereignty over people and nations—past, present, and future.

And that leads us to the communion table where we seek God through these elements and know he offers so much through his Son, the very one Haggai and Zechariah prophesied about.