

6pm Evensong 19 April 2026

Haggai 1:13-2:9 and 1 Cor 3:10-17 – When we open ourselves up to his purposes, God will be with us

If you've ever made a will you will know that it is an exercise in both looking back, and in looking ahead. Thinking about which possessions you value and wondering who might benefit from them or appreciate them in the future. Thinking about the people who have been important in your life. Those you have responsibilities towards, and those who are special to you and who you want to remember. We're looking back and reflecting on what we've invested in; what we've thought was worth preserving; what we've considered worth building upon.

Both of tonight's readings explore what it means to be involved in building something with God.

The church in Corinth is prone to forming factions around different leaders. The Corinthian church needs to hear from Paul that whilst every church is built by many different people, every church has only one foundation, and that foundation is Jesus Christ.

Paul is very aware that church leaders, like Paul and Apollos, are **[choosing] with care how to build on [that foundation]**. But he also knows that the value of their work will only become apparent on Christ's return, on Judgment Day.

Our reading from the book of Haggai focusses on the re-building of the Temple, in Jerusalem, after the Israelites have been allowed to return from exile in Babylon, at the heart of the Persian empire. The book of Haggai only has two chapters, covering a period of only 4 months. These two chapters, of which we heard the middle section, tell us how the rebuilding of the Temple came about.

Had we heard the opening of the book, we would know it was the civil and religious leaders of the Israelite community – Zerubbabel, the Governor of Judea, and Joshua, the high priest – who were first addressed by Haggai and who were challenged to think about why the community was feeling so discouraged.

In chapter 1 we'd have heard how, sixteen years after they have returned to Jerusalem, God tells them ***you have sown much, and harvested little; you eat but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; you earn wages to put them into a bag with holes. ... You have looked for much, and it came to little. Why? asks the Lord. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses.***

The people have been so preoccupied with their own affairs that they have forgotten about God and about his priorities. They've stopped making God the centre of their lives.

They wouldn't have had to look far for excuses for doing this. We can read in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra that when they returned to Jerusalem, they found rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem had been extremely difficult, fraught with danger and frustrated by delay, because the rebuilding was opposed by the neighbouring peoples.

Even at the time that Haggai brings this message from God, the international situation is tense, with Persian troops passing through Judea *en route* to Egypt. The economic situation is precarious too. The struggle to reconstruct lands ravaged by war and damaged by drought has been hampered by poor harvests and rampant inflation. The people's initial enthusiasm about being back in Jerusalem wore off years ago. Not for the first time in their history, the Israelites are not short of good reasons, or excuses, for not prioritising God.

Perhaps things are not so different in our own times. Every generation faces pressure to compromise, and has to work out what it means to prioritise God. Each generation has to work out what a committed Christian life looks like. And left to ourselves, we find all sorts of excuses not to respond to God. Whether it is the children, or the grandchildren, or "I'm at a critical point in my career", or "I can't leave the garden", or "I can't leave the dog".

But listening to our reading from Haggai, we notice how it was the Lord who ***stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel... and the spirit of Joshua ... and the spirit of all the remnant of the people, and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God.*** And so the work begins. We even know the exact date on which the work begins. It starts ***on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.*** We know from other sources that it is 21<sup>st</sup> September 520BC.

And then, a little over 3 weeks later, on 17<sup>th</sup> October 520BC, ***the word of the Lord came [again] by the prophet Haggai*** with another message for Zerubbabel, and for Joshua, and for the remnant of the people. The message is to ***take courage, O Zerubbabel.*** It is to ***take courage, O Joshua.*** It is to ***take courage, all you people of the land.*** You are ***[to] work, for I am with you, ... according to the promise that I made to you when you came out of Egypt.***

Once again, the Israelites are to remember how the Lord has been faithful to them, delivering them out of slavery and into the Promised Land. Haggai's message from the Lord is ***my spirit abides among you; do not fear.*** Just as God had said to Joshua, ***as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you nor forsake you.*** Just as Jesus – our Emmanuel – God with us – said to the disciples, in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20 – ***I am with you always to the end of the age.***

If we can open ourselves up to what God might want us to do in our lives, God will stir us to serve him. If we are willing to offer him our time, and our money; our homes and our hearts, we find it becomes easier to follow his lead. Because it is when we prioritise God's purposes that we discover how to trust the God who says to us, as he did to Zerubbabel, to Joshua, to the Israelites willing to trust in him, and to so many others before and since, ***I am with you ... my spirit abides among you – do not fear.***