

Worship Resources - *A New Church*

<https://youtu.be/j33r3CSp0iU>

4th Sunday in Lent, Year B,

14th March, 2021

John 2:13-22 CEV / Haggai 2:1-9 NIV

Prelude *The Ash Grove*, traditional Welsh Air,
played by church musician Annie Center,
used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

<https://youtu.be/02ntOWTKVPY>

Intro / Call to Worship

We are here together in the name of Christ Jesus,
in the Presence of an awesome, Holy Love.

A person without God is like a feather in a perpetual wind, blown all over the place without any control or choice in where to rest.

O come, let us return to the living God, Let us bow before the One who is our Maker.

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

As we gather today and listen to the following selection from Annie, let's give some thought to what it means to be a community of faith, and reflect on those relationships that we value as part of that community.

Reflection Video *Church in the Wild Wood*

music by Dr. William S. Pitts, played by Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/bzVcONysWgQ>

Invocation

Heavenly Father, Your steadfast love endures forever. We have seen Your love expressed in the lives of Your chosen people in the Scriptures. And we have experienced Your steadfast love in our very own lives. Even though they sinned, when they repented, You saved them from distress. Likewise, Father, we remember how You have forgiven us when we have returned to You in faith, repentance, and

obedience. Help us share the good news of Your salvation with others, and hear us as we pray in Jesus' holy name:

*"Our Father, who art in Heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
Thy kin-dom come, thy will be done,
On Earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kin-dom, the power, and the glory,
forever and ever, Amen."*

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. (light candle) Amen.

In our Gospel reading this morning, we hear of Jesus showing great displeasure in what the temple of God has become. As we listen to these words from John, let's think about where we are as a community of faith, and how we may have strayed from where we should be.

Gospel Reading John 2:13-22 CEV

Not long before the Jewish festival of Passover, Jesus went to Jerusalem.

There he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves in the temple. He also saw moneychangers sitting at their tables.

So he took some rope and made a whip. Then he chased everyone out of the temple, together with their sheep and cattle. He turned over the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins.

Jesus said to the people who had been selling doves, "Get those doves out of here! Don't make my Father's house a marketplace."

The disciples then remembered that the Scriptures say, "My love for your house burns in me like a fire."

The Jewish leaders asked Jesus, "What miracle[a] will you work to show us why you have done this?"

"Destroy this temple," Jesus answered, "and in three days I will build it again!"

The leaders replied, "It took forty-six years to build this temple. What makes you think you can rebuild it in three days?"

But Jesus was talking about his body as a temple.

And when he was raised from death, his disciples remembered what he had told them. Then they believed the Scriptures and the words of Jesus.

Scripture Video

John 2:13-22 *The Cleansing Of The Temple*

Lectionary bible reading

<https://youtu.be/51-zChvdiSk>

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning, we take time to pray for those among us who struggle with sadness and unmet expectations, with grief and struggles of the spirit. May God give comfort and strength.

We also give thanks for the spread of vaccinations and the prospective of a return to a new normal, one with more opportunity to share time together in fellowship.

We also pray for those who still struggle from illness and injury, and pray not only for their healing and strength, but also for those who support and treat them.

We also continue to keep our church leadership in our prayers, as they discern our way forward in this new reality.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

O holy One, we thank you that we stand in a long line of believers who have been faithful through the ages. You have been leading your people through trial and difficulty and have always set before them hope for today and hope for a better tomorrow. We pray that you would bless us in our time as we seek to be as faithful as our forebears. May we too know the faith which is filled with hope in things not seen.

- Give to us a faith like the grain of mustard seed which had small beginnings but which yielded large results.
- Give to us the faith to move the mountains of difficulty which come to each of us.
- Give to us the faith that sees a distant goal and is willing to work to achieve it.
- Give to us a faith which has a vision of a new world where peace and love characterize the transactions of people and of nations and where war is no more.
- Give to us a faith such as Abraham's to move forward not knowing our destination but trusting in your guiding providence.
- Give to us a faith which is able to endure those moments of personal disquiet and to trust that you are with us.
- Give to us a faith which sees the welfare of humankind as our business because it is the focus of your enduring love for your people.
- Give to us a faith which sees beyond the years to an eternal city.

God, give us faith to walk with you through the ebb and flow and the victories and the defeats of life and to achieve victory and mastery of life. Amen

In our prophetic reading today, we hear of the struggles of a people to rebuild their lives and faith community returning from exile in a foreign land. As we hear these words from Haggai, let's reflect on our own return from exile, and how we discern our path in the days ahead.

Words of the Prophet Haggai 2:1-9 NIV

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai:

“Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak,^[a] the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them,

‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?’

But now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ declares the Lord. ‘Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty.

‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord Almighty.

'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty.

'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty."

Message – A New Church

"The good ole days," is an expression I would wager any of us with many years behind us finds familiar. We all have that sense of nostalgia, of remembering better days in the past, when things were easier or when we perceive we were more successful. It could be the happier days of play in our childhood, or our time as young adults when our bodies were healthier and in better shape. To think of the past as a better and maybe a more glorious time than the present seems to be a common human tendency. A few centuries ago, the Spanish poet Jorge Amado declared, "Always to our view, time now past was just better to us." After a year of quarantine and staying home, it may be as simple as remembering a time without masks, a time when we could gather together in fellowship.

As members of a faith community, I'm sure many of us can remember the "good ole days" there as well. Times when the pews were full and the church was abuzz with activity and young people. When many of us raised our families together as part of a faith community and built connections that have lasted a lifetime. Yet, as it has been said in many ways, change is the one constant in life. Children grow up and move on. Parents get older. Culture moves on.

In our reading from Haggai this week, we encounter an audience who has been through significant change. "The glory days" of old came crashing down a generation ago in violence and exile. All who could remember those days are gone. Now they are returning from exile to try and rebuild their lives and form a new society in the rubble of what was. They see the remnants of their former glory, broken and strewn about all around them. They struggle to rebuild their personal lives and to restore their temple to its former glory. The outcome of the work restoring the epicenter of their faith was quite disappointing, if not frustrating, to those of the small nation of Judah. After a generation of exile,

they were trying hard to bring back the presumed glories of their past before defeat and exile, but nothing had gone as expected with the restoration work.

For Haggai's contemporaries, a less-than-perfect temple was nothing in comparison with their image of what the temple had looked like during those better times in the past. That “nothingness,” the result of their current efforts, was acknowledged by the prophet himself, but not without a bit of irony and surprise. “Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory?” he asked. “How does it look to you now?”

When things do not go as expected, it is often human nature to seek to place blame, isn't it? In Haggai's time, I'm sure many looked to those who focused on rebuilding their personal homes and lives and viewed them as not giving enough to rebuilding the community of faith. For many, they may place the blame on God for not providing the support and prosperity needed to rebuild God's dwelling place in the temple. Both in this passage and the context of the world today, the temple is not merely a building but a community of faith living in response to God. Just as a family may look at an old farm and relish the heydays of yesteryear without putting effort into tilling the soil and planting the seed, so the present community may be unwilling to do the work necessary for a rich harvest.

God calls God's people into relationship with God and one another. Sustaining both of these relationships is key to building and supporting the community of faith. So is constant assessment of our expectations. Haggai is making the point that they cannot rely on the glory of the past to sustain them, but to look at what God can do in the present and going forward. God has carried them through and will continue to lead them. But it may not look like what they expect, yet God is there, God is everywhere, even outside the faith community in the wider world.

How much are we like those Judeans of old? We too can have a “Camelot” memory. Our congregation can certainly look to the distant past and relive the glory of days of old. Days when folding chairs had to be put down the aisle at Easter because the pews were full. Days when Sundays brought a healthy Sunday School attendance of all ages and families grew up together in the church, While those memories may bring a smile to our faces, they also entail a

little bit of grief, don't they? The sense of loss of what was and is not to be. Much like the audience in Haggai's time, we too seem to be returning from exile to the remnants of what was. When we survey where we are now, are we tempted to ask, like Haggai, "Is it not in your sight as nothing?" Is it truly nothing, or are we using the wrong lens to make our evaluation?

One thing this passage makes clear is that the faith community cannot live on what was in the past. Too often, like Haggai's audience, we make the building the focus of our expectation. Older members recall the heyday of the church when the building buzzed with activity every day of the week. It's easy to think that if we just spruce it up and make it inviting, people will come and we'll get back to those "good ole days." Yet that building focus may actually be detrimental to attracting newcomers, particularly younger ones, struggling to juggle work, family, and other responsibilities. They might find it easier to start fresh without an aging building which requires maintenance and upkeep, and the expectation that they will turn the church back into what it once was. For those with a long history in the church, it can be easier to focus on the building than the actual purpose of that building in the first place, to be the focus of the call of God to be in relationship with each other and the wider community, to be the kin-dom of God here and now in this place.

How much does financing and maintaining an aging building consume our time and distract us from that calling? What does it mean to put God and God's work first, creating a space for the congregation and community to gather to worship God together, to study Scripture together, and to seek to live out our lives together as the people of God? Does this always entail a building? Does God call us to provide a gorgeous sanctuary, or to provide a sustainable way of living out our faith together? Big questions to consider for sure.

The great assurance Haggai offers the people is that God is truly present with them as they struggle with their past and with their future. "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." The divine call to build the temple is a call to relationship and commitment with God. Whatever may befall us, whatever the quandary of the day, we have the Almighty's promise, "I will be with you," which is echoed throughout the Old Testament. This promise is given

again by Jesus in all four of the Gospels, most poignantly in the form of the Advocate, or Spirit, sent by the Father to guide us. He uses the plural form of you when promising the Spirit's assistance, sent to guide us in community. He, too, demonstrated how clinging to the ways of the past can corrupt our mission in the world today. He literally flipped the tables to show how clinging to the routines and ways of the past can lead us astray. Either the Spirit abides or it does not abide. The Spirit dwells where God decides it will. Our job is to discern where the Spirit is at work and seek to support that work.

What do we need to do God's work in the here and now is the question to ask ourselves. We may be surprised by the answer we discern. Like those returning from Babylon, we too are returning from exile. How will we use this opportunity to be the new church rising from what was? What will that look like? May we seek the leading of the Spirit together, and seek to be what God is calling us to be now, and while relishing the memories of what was, work together to move forward and leave the past behind us. May God's will be done. Amen.

Call to Serve.

Sisters and brothers,

God's ancient, steadfast love is not a love that simply waits for us to stop wandering and return home. God's love comes seeking us, and gives us the gift of Jesus, so that we might have life abundant. Our giving this morning, whether we have been lost and wandering, or secure and safe, expresses our firm conviction that God is with us, no matter what. Let us gather our gifts together and offer them to God in gratitude, heartfelt commitment, and praise.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. Today, we listen to the following song, Inspired by Love and Anger, let's give some thought as to what inspires us to make positive change, and how can we make positive change in our own lives, and the lives of others in the coming week.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [Video]

Inspired by Love and Anger

performed and posted to YouTube
by UCPC Upper Clyde Parish Church,
written by Graham Maule and John L. Bell,

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https://youtu.be/CuApTydEi_o

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

O Generous One, we give thanks to you

for your steadfast love endures forever.

May these gifts be used to feed the hunger and satisfy the thirst

Of all those you love throughout your creation. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

May the holy wisdom of God Guard your ways and guide your paths. May the living truth of God Enlighten your hearts and open your minds And may the living Spirit of God Give you life, and life to the full! **Amen!**

As we extinguish this candle, carry its divine spark into your lives this week, sharing God's love and light with all you encounter. Amen.

Postlude

The Love of God,

music by Frederick Lehman,

performed by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/K1E-DqOVeWU>