

Morning Worship

28 June 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Morning Worship here at the Parish churches of Coxley with Godney, Henton, and Wookey. Although we are currently apart due to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) it is hoped that following this liturgy knowing that others in the benefice will be doing so at the same time might help provide a spiritual connection between us.

It is suggested that alongside this liturgy you have a means to listen to the suggested hymns which have links to videos with lyrics within this document. There is a mixture of traditional hymns and contemporary worship songs. If you do not know the tune then why not listen to the hymn/song and worship through reading the words alone.

The service is designed to be used easily by one person. If there is more than one person participating, either one can lead with others joining in with the responses in **bold** OR everyone present may join in with all the words.

The sections in *red italics* are rubrics: these explain what needs to happen at various points.

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MORNING WORSHIP

GREETING

Praise God! For even though we are apart the Lord is in our midst!
Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory.

CALL TO WORSHIP

The Lord is here!
His Spirit is with us!

Though we find ourselves isolated
in homes, apartments, and residential places,
**we look out our windows and remember,
the heavens declare the glory of God,
all creation rejoices in our creator.**

Psalm 19:1

Though we cannot reach out and touch
our friends and neighbours,
**we rejoice that Christ is in our midst,
he is with us always, until the end of the age!**

Matthew 28:20

Though we have to stand at a safe distance from others,
giving space to those who pass us by,
**we recall we are all made in the image of God,
connected to one another,
connected to God.**

Genesis 1:27

HYMN: LEAD US, HEAVENLY FATHER, LEAD US

[Listen here](#)

CONFESSION AND WORDS OF COMFORT

The Spirit of the Lord fills the world
and knows our every word and deed.
Let us then open ourselves to the Lord
and confess our sins in penitence and faith.

**Father, we have sinned against heaven and against you.
We are not worthy to be called your children.
We turn to you again.
Have mercy on us,
bring us back to yourself as those who once were dead
but now have life through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

A period of silent reflection follows

Hear the words of comfort, our Saviour Christ says to all who truly
turn to him:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish
but have eternal life.*

John 3:16

COLLECT

Let us pray.

A period of silent prayer is kept.

God our saviour,
look on this wounded world
in pity and in power;
hold us fast to your promises of peace
won for us by your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

HYMN: HE WILL HOLD ME FAST

[Listen here](#)

THE WORD OF GOD

Hear what God is saying to his people according to the prophet Haggai.

1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest:

²“Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.” ³ Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ⁴ “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ 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. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

⁷ “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁸ Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord. ⁹ You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labours.”

¹² Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord. ¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, “I am with you, declares the Lord.” ¹⁴ And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of

Jehozadak, the high priest, 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, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

THE SERMON

By Revd Guy Martin-Scott

INTRODUCTION

Last time we were looking at Ezra 4 and how the Jews in Jerusalem were facing opposition to their faith because of the foul motives and fear of attack from their adversaries and how these very same things can damage our faith today. We see foul motives in our own lives as we act in service of our own purposes rather than God's be that through acting selfishly or through our own inaction. It cannot have escaped your notice that these themes have come plainly into view with the rise of the Black Lives Matter campaign as we see how we in the Church of England have failed to stand against injustice and in some cases have even been guilty of perpetuated racial discrimination in how we appoint clergy. This is just one of many sinful actions, or lack of action, committed by Christians that damages not only the reputation of the Church but also the faith of countless Christians.

Just as foul motives can damage our faith so too can fear of opposition. We do not face persecution in the same way as many of our Christian brothers and sisters overseas do, but in a climate where faith is often ridiculed and regarded as something to keep private it can feel like we too are under attack. This can discourage us, make us afraid, and forget the goodness and faithfulness of God. When this happens it ultimately damages our faith.

But this is not the end of the story for we discovered that we can act against foul motives and fear by turning to Jesus Christ. When we turn to Christ and think about what he would do in any given situation we are guarded against foul motives, both that come from within ourselves and in how we react when people approach us with

foul motives. Not only that but in turning to Christ we are reminded of the faithfulness of God, how the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ are all events that are in fulfilment of promises made by God long ago - we follow and worship a God who is faithful. Not only that but he gave us his Church, a community of people, to remind us of the faithfulness of God. So, when we are faced with doubts, or fear, or discouragement, or persecution, we can turn to Christ and know that our God is someone who keeps his promises and will not abandon us and if we are so lost in fear and doubt that we cannot see that for ourselves, we have God's people, his Church, to help bring us back to him and guide us.

That was last time. This time, we are picking up at around the same point in time because although we saw last time that the foul motives and fear that affected the Jews and stopped them from building the temple for 16 years we didn't get any information at all about what exactly happened during those 16 years - what did the Jews get up to instead?

My parents recently retired but just before they did they were asking themselves "What on earth are we going to do with all this time?!" Needless to say they have found plenty of things to keep them occupied during retirement - I'm not sure I have ever seen the garden look so good! And they now live up to that sentiment that I have heard from so many retired people that they've never been busier! Given our current situation, when we cannot worship in our usual way on a Sunday or meet together for morning prayer we are faced with that same question my parents faced- what should we be doing with all this time? Is this quieter time an opportunity, a bit like retirement, to become busier than ever before with our faith? That is what we will be exploring today.

INSIGHT FROM THE PROPHETS

As I have said, the book of Ezra gives us no information at all about what occurred during the 16 years that the work on the temple stopped but we do get an indication of somewhere we might find out what happened. In Ezra 5:1-2 we read:

‘Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. 2 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.”

Now, the prophets throughout the Bible have a reputation primarily for one thing - calling out the faithless behaviour of God’s people and telling them to return once more to God. Given that Ezra 5:2 shows a sudden restart in the building of the temple it would seem that Haggai and Zechariah called out the behaviour of the Jews in those 16 years when the temple wasn’t being built. So to find out exactly what that negative behaviour was and what it might teach us today we’re going to need to look at the books of Haggai or Zechariah.

Now you understand why our reading this morning today was from Haggai 1. It is from this reading that we will discover what the Jews were doing for 16 years instead of rebuilding the temple and discover why they jeopardised their return to worship God, the repair of their relationship with him, and the restoration of their identity as his people.

PRIORITISING PROSPERITY

The behaviour of the Jews in the 16 years when no work was happening on the temple is clearly stated in Haggai 1:9 whilst the temple ‘lies in ruins...each of you busies himself with his own house.’ During those 16 years when the Jews were too afraid or discouraged to work on the temple they focused on themselves and their needs and not on God. They had prioritised their own prosperity over the work on the temple.

The Jews had given up a lot for God. They had left the land that most of them had grown up in to be faithful and return to God and worship him by rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. But this passion for their faith, this willingness to sacrifice their own comfort for God had gradually faded as opposition hampered the development of their calling. The Jews had not deliberately rebelled against God in

fact Haggai not once lists the sins of the Jews like many other prophets do. Rather the Jews had become content with the situation they were in - worshipping in a ruined temple - rather than being dissatisfied with the situation and seeking to continue to do the work of God.

We are all prone to prioritising our prosperity over work on the temple that is ourselves - God's living temple. For us, working on the temple means working on our individual faith but also on building up the rest of the temple - the community of Christians we are a part of. We do this by living the life that God has called us to, devoting ourselves to knowing and serving God and helping others know him too. Our temple work often suffers the same as Zerubbabel's temple. We have all at some point in our lives committed ourselves to following Jesus and had a passion for doing his work and making it a priority in our lives. But perhaps we faced opposition ourselves or disillusionment or unanswered prayer and it became easier to focus on our own lives - our careers, our families, and our hobbies. Or perhaps you just became content with your faith as it was, it didn't need any more work so you could prioritise other things. Whatever your reason, God, his Church, and your faith dropped down your list of priorities. God was no longer glorified in your life but became an activity you fitted in to the rest of your schedule.

We can often come up with excuses for seeking our own prosperity over the work of God. The Jews even tried to excuse themselves saying "the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord" (Hg. 1:2). Last time I said that opposition is no excuse for forgetting God's faithfulness and our call to do the work he has called us to. This time I'm adding to that saying that inconvenient timing, or lack of money is no excuse either. It is easy to make excuses for not prioritising God with our time and money but rather seek our own prosperity - "we're in a recession I can't give right now" or "once I get that promotion I can give to the church" or "life is hectic right now I have no time for church let alone taking on any other role."

But this lifestyle of prioritising ourselves over God does not lead to a

satisfied life. We see this in the parable of the rich fool where Jesus tells us that 'life does not consist in the abundance of possessions' for they only last this lifetime and then are gone (Lk. 12:13-21). Only God can truly satisfy and as Jesus said when we prioritise God and his work everything else will be provided for: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you" (Mt. 6:33).

In the 16 years in which Ezra is silent, Haggai shows us that the Jews had prioritised their prosperity and forgot about God's work. They did this by making excuses about poor timing and becoming content in worshipping God in a ruined temple rather than continuing the work he has called them to. So what causes the turn around that we read about in Ezra 5:2? What does Haggai say to them to get them to 'rebuild the house of God'?

PRIORITISING GOD

In Haggai 1:8 we hear Haggai give the Jews an instruction from God. It is an instruction to 'go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified.' God wants his people to prioritise him and not themselves, to return to working on the temple rather than their own prosperity. But in order for them to do that God gives another instruction before in verse 7 which lays the foundations for that will enable the Jews to prioritise God once more: 'Consider your ways.' The Jews cannot start to do God's work, to make him their priority, until they have had a time to reflect on their faith and realise that they should not be satisfied with the state of the temple.

When we do not prioritise our faith by seeking to know God and make him known then being a Christian, as I have said, can often become an activity we do rather than something we are. The same is true if we become content in our journey of faith and no longer feel the need to know God more. This means our faith is given it's time slot in our weekly activities and can be replaced if something else comes up. We need to regularly give ourselves time to "consider our ways" and reflect on our faith to keep our priorities in order. How am I spending my time? Is God my priority? How am I spending the

money God has given me? How am I using my status to help the needy and oppressed like Jesus did? Am I content with where we are as a church? What do I need to continue to grow in my faith? It is helpful to write questions like this down so you can come back to them when you re-evaluate to see how you're doing.

Prioritising God also means making a conscious effort to listen to God. With all the noise of the world distracting us, with temptations or opposition taking us away from God we need to make the effort to listen to God. We need to take God's word seriously and respond to it when we hear it - that's what Zerubbabel, Joshua (Jeshua in Ezra), and the remnant in Jerusalem did. They listened to what God was saying through Haggai and then 'obeyed the voice of the Lord their God' (Hag 1:12). The Jews took what God was saying seriously.

But listening to God's word is not an easy thing to do! In Haggai we have one of the few occasions in the entire Old Testament when a prophet has actually been listened to! Many prophets came before Haggai who attempted to warn the people about the exile to Babylon but they weren't listened to. So why was this different? It is because the Jews humbled themselves and admitted they were wrong. But humility does not come easily! The Bible, God's written word for us today, speaks to us and regularly confronts the way we live our lives, how we spend our money, how we speak, and how we treat others. We can often be called to go against the way society or culture is pulling us, even to go against what we previously thought to be true. But this is what God is calling us to, he is calling us to know him through his word. We need to regularly approach the Bible with humility and submit ourselves before it for only then will our priorities be about knowing God and seeking his will

When we take time to reflect on our faith and take time to hear God's word we are putting ourselves in the best position to make God our priority. This is because of the fear of the Lord. In Haggai 1:12 after the people obey God's word we read 'And the people feared the Lord.' This is a mysterious phrase and is often taken to mean any number of things. Here it shows that the Jews were startled awake by the

voice of God. It was almost as if the Jews had been daydreaming - going along their merry business without thinking about whether it was what they were supposed to be doing and then - BAM! - God's word suddenly wakes them up from their slumber! In hearing God speak and reflecting on their ways the Jews remembered who God is - someone to be feared and someone to prioritise. God is ultimately the one with all the power, he is the creator of the universe, our judge, and our redeemer. These are all things that we can know from reading the Bible and reflecting on our faith. If we do not fear God then we are not taking him seriously and he will not be our priority. But he is not looking for us to make him our priority out of fear alone (that would not be in keeping with the God we see in the Bible), rather the fear of God is like a spark from jump leads - it is what gets us started on our journey to prioritise God in our lives. Fear of God is the start, but it is the knowledge of God, of his love and grace shown to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in whom we too can receive eternal life, that sustains us as we seek to prioritise God and not our prosperity. In knowing God, both as one whom we fear and as one who loves us beyond comparison, through reflection on our faith and through reading the Bible, we are best placed to make God the priority of our lives.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I started this sermon asking the question "what should we be doing with all this time we have whilst we await the re-opening of our church buildings?" Well I hope I have shown through the prophet Haggai that we should be prioritising God by reflecting on our faith, asking ourselves the difficult questions about where we currently are and where we are going in our faith and that we should be looking to God's word, as found in our Bibles, to know who God is and to make him known. If we do this then we can avoid the trap of prioritising ourselves which is a path that only leads to dissatisfaction as we start to realise that the things of this world are only temporary, but God and his love for us endures forever.

Amen.

HYMN: WORD OF GOD

[Listen here](#)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

INTERCESSIONS

Use the silence between each prayer to bring before God your own concerns around that topic.

Jesus, our exalted Lord, has been given all authority.
Let us seek his intercession that our prayers may be perfected
by his prayer.

Jesus Christ, great high priest,
living for ever to intercede for us,
pray for the Church and its leaders, your broken body in the world...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, King of righteousness,
enthroned at the right hand of the majesty on high,
pray for the world and its leaders, and make it subject to your gentle rule...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, Son of Man,
drawing humanity into the life of God,
pray for your sisters and brothers in need, distress, or sorrow...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus, pioneer of our salvation,
bringing us to glory through your death and resurrection,
surround with your saints and angels
those who have died trusting your promises...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, Lord over all things,
ascended far above the heavens and filling the universe,
pray for us who receive the gifts you give us for work in your service...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ,
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit
and in the bond of peace,
and bring the whole created order to worship at your feet;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom 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.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

HYMN: PRAISE TO THE LORD, THE ALMIGHTY

[Listen here](#)

DISMISSAL

God the Father,
who first loved us and made us accepted in the beloved Son,
bless you.

God the Son,
who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood,
bless you.

God the Holy Spirit,
who sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts,
bless you.

The blessing of the one true God,
to whom be all love and all glory for time and for eternity,
come down upon you and remain with you always.

Amen.