

Sermon for The First Sunday after Epiphany of our Lord 2021.

Haggai 2:4b-9. 1 Peter 2:1-10. Psalm 118:19-24.
Luke 2:41-52.

The Collect: Lord, we beseech thee to keep thy Church and household continually in thy true religion; that those who lean only on the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Haggai 2:5b ‘My Spirit abides among you; fear not.’

Well, what a week it has been! You probably watched the chaotic, and deadly scene of the storming of the Capitol Building, a great stone edifice in Washington DC, home of The US Senate and The Congress. The death toll has now risen to five, as a policeman died of wounds sustained as he tried to defend the place. You might agree that we are witnessing historic events, possibly ranking high in the unexpected/astonishing category? It reminded me of the attempted coup in Spain, February 1981, where a gun-toting General fired his pistol and the Spanish MPs ducked for cover. To me, the Spanish debacle was surprising because it was geographically close, and post-war Europe seemed beyond expressing itself in such a violent way. Who would have imagined, other than in some trashy movie, that shots would be fired in the US Capitol, centre of the world’s most powerful democracy?

Add to this foreign political upheaval the medical emergency of the epidemic, and the quickly rising morbidity and mortality rate seen in our own country, where a ‘sophisticated’ population are served by some of the best scientific brains in the world. We read in Haggai (2:6) ‘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; and I will shake all nations...’ These words of the prophet Haggai came at a time when the people of Israel had been allowed to return to their land from exile in Babylon to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, in 538BC. They were faced with an area wrecked many years previously when they were exiled under Nebuchadnezzar for failing to pay tribute to him. In Ezra 3:1-4:5 as the restored Temple was dedicated, those with a distant memory of the former Temple wept with a mixture of joy and sadness, as the new one did not match its previous glory. In our Gospel reading today we hear of puzzlement when the young Jesus was found in the Temple (further restored and beautified by Herod), and Jesus asked his worried parents (Lk. 2:49) ‘How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house? And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them.’

It is therefore comprehensible that many people will be confused and possibly frightened by what they see and read about today. Yet, Haggai says: ‘My Spirit

abides among you; fear not.’ And Jesus, with Mary and Joseph are at their wits end after looking for him for three days, blithely asks them where else they would expect to find him? Yes, he was only twelve, but, he had a point!

The point applies to us to! Where should our hearts be, and what should we be doing in the midst of meltdown? When we see mobs of idiots and anarchists violently foisting their own opinion on the majority, and when the best public health advisers can’t control the spread of a tiny virus by sensible instructions alone, it is reasonable to be anxious about both the present and the future. Loss of control is disturbing, both personally and nationally. So, what point was Jesus, age 12 of Nazareth, making that applies to us now? Surely, it was: when God’s Spirit is present, things are **not** out of control. Ultimately, He will bring forth fruit, but only when people listen and obey Him: when they don’t act with hubris.

Notice that Jesus in Lk. 2:49 (RSV) asks: ‘Did you not know I must be in my Father’s house?’ Actually, the word ‘house’ isn’t in the text. It can be translated as ‘about my Father’s things.’ Yes, he was in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening, and asking questions (to their amazement about his comprehension). But, there is no point having the beautiful Herodian Temple, nor its previous simpler version, if God is merely discussed there, and not actually present in reality. The wise words of the US Constitution are accepted in the Capitol Building, and prayers are said there from day to day. But, how much of it is written in the heart of the Senators and Representatives? Are they about Our Father’s business, or their own? Are we about Our Father’s business, or our own?

As we witness the exposure of human cleverness, and seem to lose a semblance of worldly control, we must conclude that the game is up! Ultimately, if Jesus has ‘left the house’ the show is over. But, He hasn’t! Christians who are born again of the Holy Spirit know that the true edifice is built of ‘living stones...built into a spiritual house, and the head of the corner (Jesus) is a rock that will make men fall... because they disobey the Word.’ (1 Peter 2:1ff). Yet, as Christians we have the reassurance talked of in Haggai and elsewhere, namely, ‘My Spirit abides among you; fear not.’

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.