

September 8, 2019  
13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
**Open Hearts**

**Haggai 1:1–11 (NIV84)**

*In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: <sup>2</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built.’ ” <sup>3</sup> Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup> “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” <sup>5</sup> Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>6</sup> You have planted much, but have 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.” <sup>7</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>8</sup> Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the LORD. <sup>9</sup> “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 his own house. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. <sup>11</sup> I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Today begins a series of three weeks focused on giving. Very often stewardship discussions focus on time, talents and treasure. It is good to consider how we are using all three to God’s glory. However, this year we will narrow the focus to treasure. That’s right, we are going to talk about money for three weeks! I can tell how excited you are already. After we have learned and relearned God’s principles for giving money, we will have ten weeks to practice these principles. Thus the name on the front of your bulletin, “10 for 10.” The first “10” is for 10% and we will clarify what God really says about giving a tithe or 10% next week. The second “10” is for 10 weeks.

So, yes, we will be talking a lot about money. However, as the Old Testament reading for today emphasizes, money is just a symptom of what is going on in people’s heart. The Lord sends his prophet Haggai to the people not to open their checkbooks, but to first of all open their hearts.

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For 70 years the Jews of Judah had been living in exile in Babylon. The Babylonians had destroyed both Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord. This was the time of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. This was the time of Daniel in the lions’ den. In 539 B.C. Cyrus overthrew the

Babylonians and issued an amazing decree. The Jews could return to Jerusalem. Even more amazing than returning, Cyrus also gave them permission to rebuild the city and the temple of the Lord. So they returned with Zerubbabel as governor and Joshua as high priest. They promptly rebuilt the altar and laid the foundation for the temple. But they got distracted by enemies who did not want the temple rebuilt and by their own sinful hearts that had other priorities. So for about 15 years the temple was only an altar and foundation, a half way begun project that spoke volumes about the hearts of the people.

Haggai was sent by the Lord to change the hearts of his people. First he points out their sin.

*Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup> “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”*

Why is the Lord’s temple so important? Because that is where the Lord promised to dwell among his people before Jesus came. The temple is where the Lord offered the forgiveness of sins through the blood sacrifices offered by the priests, those blood sacrifices that pointed ahead to Jesus’ own sacrifice. The temple was the place for the Day of Atonement, the Passover and the daily sacrifices of thanks and dedication to the Lord. It was the people’s connection with the Lord in many ways. And they put it on the to do list for 15 years because other things were more important.

It was more important for them to have their own house than to have the temple. And Haggai says that the people had paneled houses. They were not building basic structures, but were putting time and energy and money into making their houses look nice. They were binge watching “Fixer Upper” or “This Old House” and were upgrading every room in the house. While their house had “curb appeal” the house of the Lord was an eyesore. While people were talking about their house in glowing terms, the house of the Lord was ignored. While they lived the good life, they despise the one from whom every good and perfect gift comes.

Having a nice house was not the sin but a symptom of their sin. Their sin began in hearts that put God second or third or wherever he would not interfere with their life too much. Giving money and goods to help with the building of the temple was going to interfere with their life so they didn’t. They were not practicing firstfruits giving. They were going to give to the temple construction fund .... if it did not affect their home construction budget....if there was something left over at the end of the month....if the price of cedar paneling did not go up....if they had a good month at work. But they didn’t have much left to give when giving leftovers because *“You have planted much, but have 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.”* There is always a more urgent use for our money when we plan to give God what is left over.

Firstfruits giving means to give careful thought to our ways and to our giving. It means to give our offerings to the Lord first. We give before we plan out the use of the remaining money. We use the leftovers for food, housing, transportation, clothing and everything else. Instead of closing our hearts to God we have open hearts and it shows in the way in which we give, giving to him first instead of last. But how are we whose hearts are too often closed with selfishness able to give with open hearts? In the same way God opened the hearts of the people at the time of Haggai.

While he called out their selfish hearts the Lord gave his people this command: *“Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>8</sup> Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored.”*

The people listened to the word of God through his prophet and repented. They began work again on the house of the Lord. They did not assume the message was for someone else. They took it to heart and repented. May we all take God’s call to repentance as if it is meant for each one of us. May we also repent of our selfish hearts and seek to honor God with our lives and our money.

As the people began to build again, the Lord gave them this amazing promise:

*“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. (Haggai 2:9).*

Solomon’s temple was an architectural marvel. The beauty and craftsmanship drew foreigners to Jerusalem just to gaze upon it. This second temple would not have the same curb appeal but the Lord says its glory will be greater than Solomon’s temple. When they complete the temple in just a few years, they will again be reminded of the promise of a Savior who will shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins. They will again be reminded of God’s rescue of his people from Egypt and pointed ahead to the Passover Lamb who will rescue people from sin and death. This second temple will have greater glory because the Son of God will come to the second temple. Jesus Christ will be there when he is twelve years old and then return during his ministry again and again to teach the people about the kingdom of God. Jesus gives the temple its greater glory. And on a Friday morning Jesus will be led from Jerusalem to a hill outside the city. There he will win peace with God for all sinners by offering his body on the cross as payment for selfish hearts and all other sin.

God planned out our salvation before the creation of the world. We were first in his heart and mind from before we took our first breath. He gave his very best to save us, his one and only Son. Jesus loved us first and gave his life in our place to give us life eternal.

Our firstfruits giving only happens with hearts that have been opened by the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord. May the Lord continue to open our hearts through the gospel.

Amen.