

Kingdom Promise

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

I'm Catherine Lopez, and I'm part of the Central Berkeley Community Group. Today's scripture reading is from the prophet Haggai, chapter 1, verse 12 through chapter 2, verse 9, and chapter 2, verses 20 to 23, as printed in the liturgy.

A reading from the prophet Haggai. Then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, Joshua, son of Josedach, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him.

And the people feared the Lord. Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people. I am with you, declares the Lord.

[1 : 11] So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, son of Josedach, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people.

They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty their God on the 24th day of the sixth month. On the 21st 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 Josedach, 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 Josedach, 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.

[2 : 16] 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.

The word of the Lord came to Haggai a second time on the 24th day of the month. Tell Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, that I am going to shake the heavens and the earth.

I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers. Horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.

[3 : 15] On that day, declares the Lord Almighty, I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord Almighty.

The grass withers and the flowers fade. The glory of God is the Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

I will be noi. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. and so we got home, and I was sawing off branches, and, you know, it's kind of like there, but it's leaning to the right now, and, you know, you spend all this time selecting the tree,

sawing the tree, lighting the tree, decorating the tree, and then after a few weeks, you know, we just throw it somewhere, and it's like after Christmas, there's just dead bodies all over the place, Christmas trees laying all over the place. We just snap out of the Christmas spirit, wake up one morning and go, there's a tree in my house, throw it away, but we try to keep our tree for, you know, the whole 12 days of Christmas to January 6th, which has meant in years past that we've had a tree on our curb for like a month, and I'm tying \$20 bills to the tree, begging people to take it away. I'm out there in February sawing the tree. It's like this tree is so much work in my life, but I think it's worth it. You know, we need trees, we need lights, we need ornaments, we need

[5 : 10] Christmas carols and cocos and candle to get us into the joy of Christmas time, especially in December, which is the darkest month of the year, and not just physically dark. It's dark in a lot of different ways. If you're a guest with us, you should know that we're a church in grief right now. Church has just lost one of our beloved youth, a family that's mourning the loss of their their eldest son. We have kids in our church who are being bullied at school, people who are struggling with their physical health and well-being, folks who are caring for aging and dying parents. One of you I talked to this past week, and you said, you know, the threat of COVID for my family and my home country has been nothing compared to the threat of terrorism there. All of us are struggling in some way, probably with holiday stress, with dysfunctional families, with depression and anxiety, or maybe that's just me. Is that just me this December? Well, the book of Haggai is written to the people of God who have experienced awful tragedy and severe trauma. It's called the Babylonian invasion, the Babylonian exile, in which people experience their loved ones dying and their families being ripped apart and their homes torn down and their city burned to ashes, their temple reduced to a pile of rubble, and they found themselves refugees, the people of God, refugees in a foreign land. We read in Psalm 127 these words, it says, by the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.

On willows there we hung up our lyres, our musical instruments. How shall we sing the Lord's songs in a foreign land? If anyone knew tragedy and trauma, if anyone knew suffering and sorrow, if anyone knew discouragement and depression, it were these remnant of exiles who just returned home to Israel. And in Advent, this is what we listen to as a church. We listen to the Old Testament prophets. We listen to these prophets who are longing with hope for a better day. They're longing with hope for the day of the Lord. They're longing with hope for the day of the long-awaited Messiah who will come and redeem his suffering people and restore God's beloved creation. And so when we get into Haggai, the preaching of Haggai, the sermons of the prophet Haggai, they're given in the midst of incredible darkness.

But it's against the backdrop of that darkness that God's light shines all the brighter. And so here's the message, I think, for us today at Christ Church, that God's Word and Spirit promise us a signet ring king. God's Word and Spirit promise us a signet ring king. I want to say a few words about God's Word and Spirit. Haggai points to this dynamic that's comprehensive throughout the Bible and that's critical for having a life with God. And that is the union and the harmony in our lives between the Word of God on the one hand and the Spirit of God on the other hand. The Word of God is external to us. It's outside of us. It's this objective revelation of God who makes Himself known.

And that revelation exists apart from us. It exists irrespective of and independent of our thoughts and feelings about that revelation. But then there's the Spirit of God which is internal. The Spirit of God that comes inside of us and gives us this subjective revelation of God's presence and God's power in our hearts, in our experience, in our conscience, so that we can personally acknowledge and understand and accept this one who is making Himself known to us in His Word. The Holy Spirit comes to us and enables us to love Him and live for Him and enjoy Him and glorify Him. So I want you to think for a minute about this external objective word. You heard it multiple times in this text, the voice of the Lord, the message of the Lord, the Word of the Lord. God shares His thoughts with us so that we might know Him. And you can hear it in verse 12. Then Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai because the Lord their God had sent Him and the people feared the Lord. This is how you know that you've truly heard the voice and the Word of the Lord.

When you fear Him, that is when awe and respect and reverence grips your heart. And from your heart, you obey with your head and what you think and with your hands and what you do. So when God gives His Word, what does He say to His people here? What does He say to His people who

are discouraged and depressed and depressed and despondent? He says to them in verse 13, I am with you, declares the Lord.

[10:40] And then He says the same thing down in verse 4. He says, be strong, be strong, be strong, all you people of the land, for I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty. And in verse 5, He says, my spirit remains among you. These are a people who are thinking to themselves, we cannot match up to our past and we have no power to achieve anything in the present. And to this people, God says, stop listening to yourself and start listening to me and my sufficiency. For in me, the living God, who is present right here with you, you have all that you need. The people of God see their unattainable past. They see their hopeless present. But what does the Lord see? The Lord sees Himself. The Lord sees the blessing of His Word. He sees the presence and the power of His Spirit. And so He says to His people, stop listening to your story of hopelessness and start listening to my promises. Because in their despondency, they are saying to themselves, I can't and therefore I won't. And God is saying,

I'm inviting you to an obedient faith that says, I can't, but God can and therefore I will. Now, by His Word, God breathes out His self. He breathes out His truth. But how do we breathe in His breathed out Word to us? And that's where the external objective Word meets the internal subjective spirit. In verse 14, we read in chapter 1, Then the spirit of the whole remnant of the people was stirred up. The spirit of Zerubbabel, the spirit of Joshua, the spirit of all the people, they came and they began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God. There are certain things that we cannot do in our own strength and our own power. Certain things that are impossible to accomplish in our own resources. And so the Holy

Spirit of God comes to us from outside. The same power of God that ordered creation, the same power that raised Christ from the dead comes and penetrates my inner self and gives me the uncreated energies of the Holy Spirit so that by faith I begin to join God in His work to make a place for His presence and His glory to dwell in this world. That's what the people of God begin to do. You see, the people had been disinterested in God. They'd become unresponsive to God, but we're told literally in the Hebrew, they're roused from their sleep. That the Holy Spirit awakens them and revitalizes them with the Word of God and they shake off their sluggishness and their fear. And there's this inward renewing work where smoldering embers are roused to a living flame in God's people. And the quickening of their spirit sparks this zealous resolution, this energized obedience, this fresh courage to begin the work of building up the kingdom of God in their midst. Now, Advent is a time for us to do the same, to be renewed both in God's Word and in God's Spirit. If we are all spirit without the Word, we're going to be a people who are lost in our own subjectivity, a people who are lost in what we think and what we feel and what we experience, not grounded in God's truth, will be tossed about on the waves of ideologies and blown about by the winds of every teaching that changes every five minutes on Twitter.

But if we're all Word people without the Spirit, we'll know the truth, but we'll have no power to do the truth. We'll have no change that comes upon us from the inside in our heart and our head and our hands.

And the Word of God will remain abstract and impersonal rather than become illuminated and alive for us like it does with the people of God. And so our invitation to you, Christ Church, is to make use of the resources we provided for you. Our guide to morning prayer in the back, our Advent devotional that you should have gotten in your email on Friday, on these Wednesday night services where we're journeying to the cradle, we're tracing out all these themes of the Scriptures and singing all of our greatest songs to have our hearts stirred up by the Spirit of God, stirred up by the Word of God to be His faithful people. So God's Word and Spirit, that's how that works throughout the Scriptures and that's how it works in our lives. But in this particular instance, God's Word and Spirit promises us a signet ring king. God's Word and Spirit promises us a signet ring king. To this promise of God's witness, God's presence with us, He adds this promise, these promises actually of how He intends to be with the people of God in the future. Now how many of you are familiar with Handel's Messiah?

[16:34] Anybody listen to Handel's Messiah? George Fritter Candle, this is his great oratorio. It's become ubiquitous in the celebration of Christmas around the world. It was actually written for Easter time.

Only the first third of it is about the birth of the Messiah. But if you've heard the oratorio, part and part one, the bass stands or comes on the stage and begins to sing the words of Haggai chapter 2

verses 6 and 7. Now I won't attempt the high baroque style for you and you're welcome. You can thank me later. But there is this one word in this particular song, the word shake, and it seems to last for almost a minute as it's sung. And as it's sung, the singer himself is shaking. And you can almost feel the earth-shaking promise of God in the song. And here are the words in verse 6, thus saith the Lord. Thus says the Lord Almighty, 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. And down in verse 9, in this place I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty. And Andrew did an amazing job last week telling us about this house of God, this point of intersection between the timeless and time, between heaven and earth, between divinity and humanity, and how God has in fact filled that place with his glory and filled that place with his peace in the person of Jesus. And all who are united to Jesus are the house of the Lord. I encourage you to go back and listen to that. But today I want to talk about how God not only shakes the earth to build up the house of his temple, but he also shakes the earth to build up the royal house of his king. And that's what verses 20 and 23 are about.

This final little sermon given directly to Zerubbabel. And Zerubbabel himself knows that he's not a great king. Yes, he's in the line of the great King David, but he's only a governor. And we're not even sure if that title is anything more than honorific. He's basically the mayor of a city in ruins. And in reality, he's the heir to nothing. There's no throne for him to mount, no crown for him to wear, no empire for him to rule, no royal acclaim for him to enjoy.

The royal enterprise in Israel and David's house has long since run into the sands. Zerubbabel, his great, great, great, great grandson is not a great king and he does not have a great kingdom. Now, King Darius of Persia, that, that's a great king. That is a guy who's ruling with some serious authority and power over one of the world's greatest empires, only to be rivaled by the Roman Empire.

[19:30] Here is Zerubbabel. All around his little province of Jerusalem, nations are opposing and thwarting the people of God as they're trying to build up the kingdom of God. And he's thinking to himself, how is God going to deal with all this opposition? How's he going to deal with all this injustice that's just overwhelming around me? And to him, God says, I'm going to keep shaking up my creation.

Verse 21, tells Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, that I'm going to shake the heavens and the earth. And I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers. Horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his comrade. It's as if God is saying, Zerubbabel, do you feel that the world is against you?

Well, it is, but I'm about to turn the world upside down. I'm about to turn the world inside out. The shaking image is an image of God defeating his enemies and establishing his rule. It tells us that the tectonic plates of political history are going to move in such a way that it favors God and the people of God. That earth-shattering events are going to take place where God inaugurates his rule and his reign. And if you pay attention to verse 22, it's emphatic and decisive about the defeat and the overturning and the destruction that God is going to bring on his enemies. It's this political announcement that is actually deeply disturbing bad news if you're a person of power and privilege. Because it says, the Lord himself is personally coming for you. And when he comes, there's going to be a cosmic shaking because of the presence and the power of the creator God. And what will this decisive divine coming put into effect? Well, on the grandest worldwide scale, as befits the creator God, he's going to reorder heaven and earth, it says. He's going to dispose of political structures and dismantle military might, and there's going to be a global judgment on the sin of the nations. That all those people throughout time who've misused their thrones and misused their chariots and their swords and all their power, the prophet, God says through his prophet, they're going down. They're going to fall under my just judgment. And God is going to unleash all the self-destructive energies of our self-centeredness and is all going to collapse in upon itself. And this whole world that's organized without reference to God, this whole world that's yielding its submission and its allegiance to the kings and powers other than God's anointed king, are going to receive divine justice and be set right.

[22:44] Now, that may not comfort us because we're not really suffering people to the scale that like our brothers and sisters in North Korea might be suffering or in Iran might be suffering, but this is really, really good news if you're under an oppressive regime. It's all the imagery and words from

the Exodus. God is saying, you remember what I did to Egypt, that great superpower? You remember the victory I caused on the far side of the Red Sea?

I can do that again. Superpowers are nothing to me. And so the question is, well, what is God going to do after he defeats all of his enemies? Is there going to be this giant power vacuum left on the earth after all these kingdoms are dispelled? And God says, no, I'm not just going to defeat my enemies.

I'm going to establish my rule. And how am I going to do that? I'm going to do it through my signet ring king. Now, Zerubbabel is kind of this odd figure historically. He's kind of a walking question mark.

People of God look at him with some tension because they know he's a descendant in the line of King David. They know about all the mind-blowing promises of God. Did you know that God promised that one of David's descendants would sit on God's throne forever? God promised that one of David's descendants would rule over all of the creation forever. And so they turn their eyes to Zerubbabel, and all they see is this pale figure of a man, this weak governor of Judah, this guy who's not even a king. He's just completely oppressed with all the promises of God on his shoulders, and none of them fulfilled.

And in that context, God says in verse 23, on that day, declares the Lord Almighty, I will take you, my servants, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord Almighty. All the promises of God to King David are being reignited in the person of Zerubbabel. And you got to think about the final verses of this book like an impressionist painting. You've got a thunderstorm. You've got an earthquake. You've got clashing armies.

[25 : 08] You've got civil disarray and conflict. You've got destruction. And then there's one shaft of sunlight that's piercing through all of this darkness, and it's shining on one item, this golden ring on the finger of God. And God is saying, look, through my chosen one, through my servant, I'm going to pick you up, Zerubbabel, and I'm going to slip you on my pinky finger. And you are going to be my signet ring on my right hand. The signet ring is a picture of God's intimacy, his authority, and his image.

It's a picture of intimacy because kings would often take their signet ring, put it on a necklace, and wear it right here next to their heart. Kings would take their signet ring, and when they'd write a decree, they'd melt a little wax, and then they'd stamp it, they'd seal it, and they'd say, this decree is going to happen. This is for real. This is legit. The signet ring was a symbol of the image of the king. It's the identity by which it's where would be known. And God is saying, Zerubbabel, I'm not going to give you my ring. You are going to be my ring. You're going to be my intimate, authoritative image by which I will be known on the earth, so that when people look at you, they're going to see me.

What a promise. The question is, when will all this happen? When is God going to shake the nations to bring about his victory? When is God going to establish the rule of his signet ring king? Well, it certainly doesn't happen in Zerubbabel's person or in his lifetime. It actually happens in one of his great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandsons who's kind of in the DNA of Zerubbabel as he receives this great promise from God. Now, to bring this home, I wonder if any of you have watched the Charlie Brown Christmas special. Anybody seen this? If you haven't seen it, you need to pull out your phone and watch it right now. If you have seen it, go home later today. That's your homework. You got to watch it. But a distraught Charlie Brown, he cries out. He says, isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about? And his buddy Linus offers the answer. He says, sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about. And he starts recounting, Linus starts to recount the beginning of Luke's gospel. And as he's doing that, you know what Linus is always holding? What's he always holding in the Peanuts comics? His security blanket.

And if you pay close attention, Linus, when he's quoting the gospel of Luke, he drops his security blanket. When he says those words, fear not, from the angels of God, he drops the security blanket. Fear not, he says, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto us is born this day in the city of David.

[28 : 21] In the city of Zerubbabel, in the city of God's great king, a savior is going to be born, which is Christ, the Messiah, the Lord. And he drops that security blanket when he hears about the chosen one, the servant of the Lord, the signet ring king, this long awaited Messiah. It's how Charlie Brown comes to know what Christmas is all about. It's how Linus gets over his fears and drops his insecurities.

Why does he do it? Because from his cradle, to his cross, to his church, and to his coming again, Jesus the king has been shaking the nations and will keep shaking the nations with his gracious rule and his liberating reign. And if you trace out the Christmas story, you can see that King Herod is feeling the shaking of God. And that's why he goes to kill Jesus and slaughters all those innocents of Bethlehem with his genocidal sword because he can feel the shaking of God coming. These kings from the far east, these wise men, they come and they can feel the shaking. Why do they bring gifts fit for a greater king? Gold and frankincense and myrrh? Because they can feel the cosmos begin to shake.

The shepherds felt the shaking when the night sky began to dance with angels and it filled up with this heavenly chorus, glory to God in the highest heaven because it's happening now. Mary and Joseph felt the shaking when they held God's breathtaking swaddled self in their arms. Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, they felt the shaking when they saw in this vulnerable baby God's answer to our suffering and our sin. Heaven and earth began to feel the shaking when this baby grew up and he became a man and he started casting out our demons and healing our diseases and satisfying our hunger and forgiving our sins and teaching us life transforming truth from God's word and giving us the Holy Spirit power of God himself. All of the cosmos began to shake because it saw in Jesus this intimate authoritative image by which God wants to be known. In this powerless baby, in this crucified criminal, in this resurrected conqueror, we see all the authority and power.

[31 : 18] All the grace and mercy, all the justice and judgment, all the glory and peace of God being exercised through his signet ring king. And a day is going to come when Jesus is going to be seen by every eye and he's going to be honored by every bent knee and he's going to be confessed by every tongue that he is the king who comes in both judgment and salvation.

Some of us might feel nervous about that. And if you feel nervous about that just judgment that's coming, that's probably a good thing and a right thing for you to feel.

But the good news of Christmas is that we can now look into our judge's face and we can see our Savior there in Jesus himself.

You see, this is what Charles Schultz, the maker of peanuts, is saying through this heavenly fear not. Through Linus dropping his security blanket, it's just so simple and brilliant and profound. When Linus realizes that Jesus, our Davidic signet ring king, is born to save us, it separates him from his insecurities and his fears.

[32 : 42] And it can do the same for us. The coming of God's anointed king, Jesus, frees us from all those false securities that we are unable or perhaps even unwilling to release ourselves.

But friends, we need not be afraid. Because God became flesh. And because Jesus is the signet ring on God's all-powerful pinky finger, we can drop our security blankets too.

I'm out of time. Bummer. I'll close with this. We're sitting around the table Monday night, Catherine and I doing what we do, being very imperfect parents.

It's trying our best to pass along our faith to our kids. You know, reading scripture or praying or listening to a hymn. This particular night, we were reading the Heidelberg Catechism.

And our deal is like, we set a timer and you just have to listen to me read it for five minutes. So that's, if you sit at our table, that's what you're getting into. Question 32 came along and it hit me like a bolt of lightning.

[33 : 50] And I'll leave it with you here. The question is, but why are you called a Christian? Answer. Because by faith, I am a member of Christ.

And so I share in His anointing. I share in the royal anointing. I share in the messianic signet ring king's anointing.

And so because I share in His anointing, I am anointed to confess His name. And to present myself to Him as a living sacrifice of thanks. And to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life.

And catch this, after this life, I'm anointed to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity. If that's true, we can drop our security blankets.

Indeed, if that doesn't cause us to drop our security blankets, I don't know what possibly could.

[35 : 06] Brothers and sisters, you are anointed with the signet ring king to reign with Him over all creation for all eternity.

Lift up your hearts in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.