

Pentecost 12

Haggai 1:12-14 – It's Time to Do the Housework!

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Haggai 1:12-14 – ¹² Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, 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.

¹³ Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. ¹⁴ So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, 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.

Introduction – Do you know anyone who enjoys doing housework? There may be some of you who do, but I haven't met too many people who enjoy it. But I think we all enjoy the result of housework. We generally like a house that is clean and well maintained. Even if we don't enjoy the work that it takes to get to that point, when we accomplish the work and see the end result and the impact that our work has made, we are encouraged and we can say, "Even though I didn't really enjoy the sweat and the stress, I can say it was worth it."

From the book of the prophet Haggai today, we see the difference between doing our own housework and doing God's housework. Think about more than just buildings, though. We are not just talking about maintaining buildings. Think of every day, every decision as your housework. Your house is not just the building you live in, but your place in this world. You work to maintain your life, your family, your career.

But God reminds us that he has housework for us as well. It is the work of maintaining the church – not just the building, but everything that the church is and does. The church is people and Christ is the center of our existence as Christians. God commands us to work hard and work well to maintain our lives and families and careers, but he warns us not to forget about the work of the Church. In fact, he says we should start first with the work of the church and then move on to the work of our lives. Otherwise the work of the church is too easily forgotten in the cares and concerns of our economy, our relationships, our growing children, our paying of bills, our time for laughter and enjoyment of our lives.

That's what happened at the time of Haggai. That's why God chose Haggai the prophet. That's why he sent him to the leaders of the people. God's house was a mess and it needed to be taken care of. Haggai's message:

It's time to do the housework!
I. God's housework is easy to put off
II. God's housework always pays off

I. God's housework is easy to put off

It was about halfway between the time of King David and the Birth of David's greatest Son, Jesus of Nazareth. It was about 500 years after David ruled over the golden age of the Kingdom of Israel and about 500 years before the everlasting Kingdom of David's Son would be established and Jesus Christ would sit on his father's throne, never to leave. Zerubbabel was a descendent of King David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ, but he had no kingdom to rule. Why not?

Because even though God had lovingly blessed his people with a kingdom of their own, the people of Israel did not flee from temptation's deadly traps. Instead, they took the bait and jumped head first into the worship of fertility gods, into greed and the lust for power and whatever they thought could give them a full and satisfying life without God's restrictions. So God sent the military might of Babylon to terrorize them and to destroy the power of those who corrupted God's people. Only a remnant, a small group of people, was preserved, protected as exiles in the land of Babylon, waiting and watching for that day when God would bring them home. He did, 70 years later, and Zerubbabel was their leader. They returned home at the urging of their new king, Cyrus the Great of Persia.

When they returned home, job #1 was to rebuild the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. It had been destroyed by the Babylonians, torn down to the very foundations. The King of Persia commanded them to rebuild the temple and God commanded them to rebuild the temple. This was God's house, the place where God promised to make his home with his people. It was there that the people of Israel met God in worship, and brought their sacrifices to him. It was where they heard about the compassionate and merciful God, who is slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness.

So Zerubbabel from the line of kings and Joshua from the line of priests led the people in the rebuilding of this great temple. They reset the building's foundations. But the Samaritans were there, immigrants who had taken over the land and they wanted to mix with the Israelites. God had commanded his people to remain separate from the other nations around them, so Israel refused their help. The Samaritans caused problems for Israel by telling the Persian rulers that it

was dangerous for the Israelites to build the temple, because the Israelites were a rebellious group of people. The older Israelites who had seen the beauty of Solomon's temple before it was destroyed knew that there was no way they could match that beauty. So they stopped building. The people decided to focus on settling down with their families, establishing farms and worked hard to prosper their lives.

Enter Haggai, 16 years later, with a message from God to wake them up. The people were suffering. Their crops were suffering from drought. They lived in the land and had nice homes, but their lives were hollow and empty. Why? Because they had become more concerned about their own housework than God's housework. The message from the Lord was this: "*Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin? . . . 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." (Haggai 1:4,8)

What was it that pulled the Israelites into spiritual danger? Apathy, fear of enemies, and seeing their own housework as being more important than God's housework. What was it that woke them up? Personal hardship and a call from the Lord to repent of their sins. Things work pretty much the same today, don't they?

Apathy is dangerous, when we no longer feel the heart wrenching pain of our guilt and no longer celebrate the rescue of our souls from hell by Jesus our Savior. Jesus says in Revelation, "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of God." (Revelation 3:2) Obviously, God is very concerned about the sins of the people in his churches and wanted to warn them as he warns us today, not to be careless about sin and not to take God's mercy for granted.

When our fear of enemies becomes greater than our fear of God, we are also in danger. The people led by Zerubbabel repented and they feared God. What does it mean to "fear"? It means to have the highest respect; to take people seriously. Jesus says, "*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*" (Matthew 10:28) God is our Judge. We must take him seriously. We have to be most concerned about what his Word says about our attitudes and how we live our lives.

And, of course, there is great danger when we view our own housework as more important than God's housework. We need to be careful caretakers of our lives and all that we have, because God gives them to us. But this world, this present time, is moving always forward to the day when everything will change and be made new. If our eyes have in sight only life now, then we will miss the better life. Jesus says, "It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them."

Servants of God, stay awake! Don't get distracted from doing God's housework! God has built his house among us. Not just this building, although this is a sanctuary dedicated to the worship of our God. God has built his house through the preaching and teaching of his Word. God the Holy Spirit has built a temple of living stones and you are those stones. Christ our Savior makes this house what it is as God dwells with us, his people who trust that our Savior was crucified for our sins, who rely on the fact that he was raised to life, the first of many of us who will rise from the dead. We are a house built on God's gracious gift of peace to us who only knew how to fight God.

We have the privilege of doing God's housework as God's servants. We have the privilege of being the people of this generation who are the caretakers of God's truth which speaks to every part of your lives. When you recognize that God is Lord of everything you do and his commands are your law and his gospel is your peace, you are doing God's housework.

II. God's housework always pays off

It can be easy to put off God's housework, to put him out of our minds when the busyness of life surrounds and overwhelms us. But God reminds us to focus on the treasure of heaven rather than the treasure of the earth. He reminds us that God's housework always pays off.

The people of Israel had to do a spiritual 180 degree turn around. Instead of focusing their full attention on their own lives and problems that affected only them, they had to turn around and look once again at the temple of God that was lying in ruins. They needed to face their fears and trust in God, going ahead with the task of rebuilding that sanctuary to be a place where God would be honored by the remnant of Israel. God had changed their hearts by showing them their sin and bringing them to repentance and showing them a new future with peace and security, because of God's promise, "*I am with you.*" Through the Holy Spirit, they obeyed the Lord, and God stirred up their spirits to do the work of rebuilding God's house. They recognized that time spent doing God's housework always pays off.

Do we always see the true value of doing God's housework? The result of some of this housework is very visible, of course. The physical things: a fresh coat of paint in the sanctuary, a resurfaced parking lot, well kept flower beds and lawns. This is a wonderful house dedicated to God and to maintain it, update and keep it clean is one way we show gratitude to our God. It shows we are being faithful and wise with the blessings God gives us – good stewards and caretakers.

It's also very visible when new people visit our church to hear God's Word and find people who are welcoming and caring and those visitors keep coming back. It makes us glad when we have a full church with familiar faces and new faces, young faces and older faces, family and friends. When we see a full, beautiful church, then it is easy to say, "God's housework does pay off!" We see the rewards and the result of our hard work.

But remember that God's house and his work is not as simple as what we observe going on around us. The work of the Holy Spirit is invisible and yet it is his work that is really the heart and core of God's housework. The Spirit who proclaims forgiveness through God's Son *does* stir up the spirits of God's people, but he doesn't always stir them up in the exact same way. So we must *be dependent* on God's Word to accomplish his housework, cleaning up and strengthening our hearts and we must *trust* that the Spirit who uses the Word is much more powerful than our own simple minds. God's Word will accomplish what the Holy Spirit wants it to accomplish.

The re-building of Solomon's temple wasn't just about the building itself. If the temple would be unused, it would be worthless. *What* was going to happen *in* that building was important. God was going to be honored. God would make his presence known among his people. God is with you always, you can be sure of that. But God is with us in a special way when we gather together as his people and enjoy the blessings of Baptism and the Lord's Supper and hear his promises and declare that his glory is greater than our own or that of any other person, even greater than the glory of the this vast universe. God wants his people to come together and honor him and we do that when we give God the very best first and reserve the rest for other areas of our lives.

Conclusion – The job of doing housework does often go unnoticed. Too often, we just assume someone will do the work. The same is true in God's house. But God has given you work to do. God has equipped you with the skills to serve and be an important part of the housework. Open your heart and hands for service, not just when asked, but whenever you see a need that you can fill.

God's servants will be doing his housework until the day he returns and judges how faithful we have been. When God reminds you that the focus of your life is not where it should be, take a page from the Israelites, fear the Lord and fall into the arms of your Savior for safety. Only by trusting in the perfect faithfulness of Christ can we face that day. May the work of living for God not seem like housework, the way people often think of it, in a negative sense. But may the Holy Spirit stir up your spirit, so that you take up God's housework willingly and joyfully, seeing it as an opportunity to say thank you to Jesus. Amen.