

Unending Encouragement

Haggai 1: 5b-2:9 & 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-5, 13-17

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2 Thessalonians 2: 1-5, 13-17

As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Haggai 1: 5b-2:9

on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.

In the second year of King Darius, in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. 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 the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts.

Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Yet now take courage.

The high school graduates of the class of 2019 have never known peacetime in our country. They have grown up in this time of the 'forever wars.' The global war on terror is the only world they have ever known. Everyone under the age of 20 in this country has not seen our

former glory outside of a history lesson, so it is in their imagination and not their memory. Many of them have grown up as the children, or relatives of, someone serving in the military. They know what it is to go months at a time, holidays, birthdays, without their loved one by their side, and many times their brief reunions are carefully orchestrated surprises that the media covers, and the heartwarming stories often go viral. Yet there are no tv cameras rolling when moms or dads again board the military planes back to places and situations and decisions that most of us cannot even imagine.

Also, away from the public eye are the all-too-often hard tales and heart breaks when a veteran leaves military life and struggles to adapt, to reconnect, to rejoin civilian life. With graphic memories of the violence they were required to inflict in the name of peace, with physical limits and losses, with the hidden scars of post-traumatic stress self-medicated into a substance use disorder, or the psychological effects of reassessing self and worth, the veterans of today so often give more than their all. Yet the harsh reality is that while military technology and strategy have changed and improved, services and support for returning veterans has not changed or improved.

We, the civilians they are fighting for, thank them for their service, but we do not really know what we are thanking them for. We want to show our appreciation and respect but do not know how. We cannot truly comprehend their experiences, their challenges, their needs. We know that there is a maze of trying to navigate through the chaotic VA system, that literally countless numbers of veterans are homeless, and that many veterans survive only to come back and die by suicide. We know there are many needs, but not how to meet those needs, especially on the grand scale that takes far more than individuals can offer. We seek, hope and pray for leadership, national elected leadership, corporate leadership, and community leaders to provide our veterans—those returning now, those who served in the Gulf, in Vietnam, in Korea, in WWII, in the Cold War, and in peacetime-- with the well-being and prosperity every veteran deserves. We need leadership with the authority, accountability and abilities to care for our veterans with ethical and decent standards.

Veterans remind us of the importance of living sacrificially for the sake of others, a message we know well through the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is why we gather here in worship, and then are sent out to serve in sacrificial ways in his name.

On the eve of Veterans' Day, we cannot just offer words of thanks, rather let us be inspired to offer an action of thanks for our veterans. I encourage each of us to honor our veterans in a tangible way, through visiting a veteran in a nursing home, or through the donation of air miles so that family members can be close during the hospitalization of a loved one for a combat injury, illness or disease, participate in Operation Gratitude which sends individually addressed care package to current military members as well as veterans, or through some other way that directly benefits those who have served for us. Let us be inspired to offer deep thanks and unending encouragement to them.

Our encouragement, for those who served, and for those who have been served, is an unending encouragement in faith lessons as old as time, faith lessons on courageous hope for the future, yet with a sense of urgency for just leadership now.

We look to the prophet Haggai, who in a time when the Jews had recently been released home to Palestine after 70 years of being exiled in Babylon, was raised up to prophesy about the need to rebuild the temple as only then would the community be restored, healed and prepared for the future and the coming of the Messiah. Whole generations had not seen the house in its former glory, it was nothing in their sight, yet now they were to take courage. Two generations

had not known the faith practices and rituals of their grandparents and ancestors. They had only known exile so could only fantasize about the former glory outside of a history lesson, as it was in their imagination and not their memory. Haggai reminded the people of God's promise and presence,

"...take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear." The prophet puts before the people a vision of ultimate well-being and spiritual prosperity in time to come.

And we look to Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. In that time, just as in our time, there were lawless ones destined for destruction. They exalted themselves above every so-called god or object of worship, so that they took seats in the temple of God, declaring themselves to be God. Paul reminded his hearers that God opposes the proud, and expects leaders of all kinds, whether political leaders, religious leaders, or corporate leaders, to act within divine, ethical, standards. Paul calls all of us to stand firm and hold fast to the religious and spiritual traditions we have been taught, God's love and grace bring eternal comfort and good hope for our hearts which are strengthened in every good work and word.

At this Veterans' Day, in words, actions and prayers may we honor and give thanks for the selfless and courageous spirit of sacrifice, but not the acts of destruction that must be carried out, and may we advocate for better and just care for our veterans. In the future time of well-being, spiritual prosperity and all leadership acting by genuine and ethical standards, may there be no more new veterans. Yet now, take courage. Amen.