



May 13, 2007

Pastor Eunbae Doh

Ezra 3:8-13
Haggai 1:1-8

“Rebuilding and Recovering”

When I first came to this Church to meet with the Parish Staff Committee for my introductory meeting, my first impression was “Wow! Look at this! What a great building! It looks like a Catholic Church. I'm so happy to be here at Baker Memorial Church, because I have had a life long dream to be a Father of a Catholic Church”. My dream came true in half at least in terms of the building.

As far as I know, most of us here at Baker Memorial UMC love our church building. We are so proud of our building, magnificent sanctuary, beautiful stained glass windows , and the architectural style.

In ancient times there were people who loved their building, just like us. I'd like to tell the story of the Judean people who loved their temple and were eager to worship there.

The people of Israel have had three temples. The First Temple was built by King Solomon in the 10th century BCE, Before the Common Era. It was the center of the life and worship for the people of God. This First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and the second temple was rebuilt seventy years later by the people who returned from exile in 515 BCE. Centuries later, it was renovated by Herod in about 20 BCE, and this is the third temple. The third Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. All of the outer walls still stand in the Holy land today.

The scripture we read this morning is about the second temple. Cyrus who ruled the Persian Empire repatriated the Judean exiles from their Babylonian captivity. Babylonia was not a bad place for them to live. At that time Babylonia was the center of the ancient culture. Many of them could enjoy their life there, but probably they missed the land of their ancestors because they considered Jerusalem as the center of their worship.

So, many Judeans had begun to return to Jerusalem. Encouraged by the edict of Cyrus, the leaders of the returned exiles began rebuilding the ruined temple in Jerusalem. They began to build the foundation of the temple with great joy and excitement.

But the work stopped because they faced serious challenge from their neighbors. Their neighbors were the people who the Assyrians had brought from Mesopotamia and who had settled in the city of Samaria. These people began to worship God, but also continued to worship a number of their own gods. When they heard that the exiles were building a temple for God, they came to the Judeans and asked to help them. But the Judeans refused their proposal. So, the Samaritans were greatly upset and tried to interfere with the construction. They hired some people to disrupt their work and frustrate their plan. They sent a letter to the king of Persia requesting that he stop the Judeans from building the temple. As a result, the rebuilding project was discontinued.

The people of Judea forgot the temple. After eighteen years, the foundation of the temple deteriorated and crumbled. According to the scripture from the book of Haggai chapter 1, verse 2-4, the prophet Haggai appeared at that time and spoke to the people, saying,

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: These people say, the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house. Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruin?”

These words are harsh. What is a paneled house? I have no idea. But I do know that it has nothing to do with the design or size of a Judean's home. It doesn't have to do with their home being a three bedroom house or even a larger four bedroom house. It's not important how big their house is, the emphasis of this scripture is not on the size or type of home the Judeans live in, but is on the state of completion. The Judeans have a "finished home while the Lord's house is very much "unfinished." Indeed, the temple is "desolate," and in "ruins"

Well, this is a very disturbing issue. Why did God ask them to rebuild his house using such strong language? Was he jealous of their earthly houses? Doesn't God want us to live in a comfortable home? Didn't God create this world and holds everything in his hand? So, why did he ask that question?

There is a scripture that demonstrates for us how God thinks about His temple. In 2 Samuel chapter 7, verses 1-2 we read,

“Now when the king(David) was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the Ark of God stays in a tent."

In verse 5-12 we read how God responded through his prophet Nathan to the King. He said, .

“Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, saying "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

And in Verse 10 He says,

“And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more. “

That's right!! God was concerned about the security of his people, not his house. God does not care where he lives, tent, tabernacle, or temple because God does not need any dwelling place. This whole world is the place of God. God's great concern and priority is not his dwelling place but his children.

So why did God ask the people of Judea, who returned from exile to build a temple? Building the temple was not for him but for his people!! Why is it for His people? God did not want to have any dwelling place. God wanted the heart of his people to return to him. God was longing for his people to recover the passion and joy of worship. God wanted to rebuild the relationship with his people through worship in His temple

Today we have heard a report from the trustees about the current situation of our building, we have heard about needed critical repairs. As we know, repairs of this magnitude take money. Some of you may think that I don't want to do that. The

Church is not a building..." Yes, church is not a building. Everyone knows that and even little children know that the church is not a building.

But this is not just a matter of building maintenance. It means something more to God, as we read in this morning's scripture the story of God's people and his prophet Haggai. God doesn't want us to do something for this building because we love this building, because we love our worship style, because we love our stained glass windows, because we love our music, because we love our Sunday school, because we love our church friends, because we love our pastor.

God want us to do something more important he wants us to recover the heart of worship.

My mother was very frugal. She never dressed in the most fashionable, fancy, latest styles. Her closet always had plenty of room. That really bothered me when I was younger, especially when she went to church. One Sunday morning, I complained to her, "Mom, please, don't shame me. You are a pastor's wife." She smiled, and said, Eunbae, I don't have many clothes. But my clothes are always clean. In her mind, to worship God meant that she did not have to have the most expensive clothes, but that she should be clean in appearance and clean in her heart.

I do not believe that God wants us to build any luxurious, gorgeous building for God. But we have a responsibility to make it clean and safe. The visual aspect of our church, like my Mom's clean clothes, reflects the way we come to worship God.

I want to share with you the words of a Korean writer. He wrote

*"You will understand as much as you see,
You will see as much as you love. "*

I hope we, God's people of Baker Memorial UMC can have an opportunity to recover something we have lost - the heart of worship and to renew our spirit as we participate in caring for God's Temple.