

## 2019 11 10 – Shaking the Nations

### Haggai 1:15b – 2:9

Is there anyone here who was living here in Swift Current 73 years ago? Do you remember what happened during the Christmas season of 1946? It was a pretty major event in the life of this congregation (*wait for answers*). Metropolitan United Church, a beautiful brick building on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue NE burned to the ground.

Now I'm going to go back and tell you the rest of the story. Again, I am going to use the story as it is written in Baden Campbell's history of First United Church, a book called *Except the Lord Do Build This House*. If you remember from last week, Knox United Church (previously Presbyterian) and Metropolitan United Church (previously Methodist) were in the process of amalgamating. In July 1943, they held the first service of the joint congregation. Six months later they chose their new name, Swift Current United Church. But it took another 2 years before the congregation made the decision to move into one building.

The vote took place in January 1946 and by an overwhelming majority they chose Metropolitan. (*Except the Lord Do Build this House*, pages 28-34) I'm not sure of all the reasons, but I did read earlier in the history book about issues with the physical structure at Knox including a leaky roof and a balky furnace. (*Except the Lord Do Build this House*, page 8).

After the decision was made, plans were put in place for the move. In the meantime repairs at Metropolitan were also undertaken. Then, less than a year later, before the move was complete, in the early hours of Sunday, December 29, 1946, the Metropolitan United Church building burned to the ground. I can only

imagine the pain and despair of the congregation and especially the official board, when they heard the devastating news.

It could have been very similar to the feelings of the Jewish exiles who returned from Babylon over 2500 years ago to find their beloved temple and the surrounding city of Jerusalem destroyed by the violence of war. The exiles started to rebuild their temple but it was difficult with a lack of skilled labour, insufficient building materials and under-funded budgets. There was no way they could create the size and majesty of the temple that Solomon had built. Some wondered whether it was even worthwhile to continue.

It was in this time that the prophet Haggai appeared on the scene saying, “Who is there left among you who saw this Temple in its former glory? And how does it look to you now? Doesn’t it seem like nothing in comparison?” He admitted that what they were building was not even close to the temple that had, for centuries, been a magnificent symbol of their faith.

I’m sure most us have experienced our share of setbacks, defeats, exiles, destruction and possibly even catastrophe in our lives. Sometimes enemies do this to us. Other times we do this to ourselves. Often there’s no apparent reason. It could be fire, war, or natural disaster; it could be health issues or financial woes; it could be lack of employment or broken relationships that have brought us to our knees. In these moments it’s hard to imagine that life will ever be the same, that rebuilding our homes, our lives, our bank account or our health is even possible. Depression and despair can sometimes overtake us.

I wonder if the folks of Swift Current U.C. felt the same way about this building that we are sitting in today. It was the obvious choice once Metropolitan had been destroyed but did it seem like second-best? Was it hard to get motivated to start the renovations all over again at Knox? In his history book Baden Campbell doesn't tell us a lot about how the people felt... he just says, "The year 1947 was a busy one for the Official Board," and then he lists all the renovations that took place including the purchase and installation of a surplus building from the airport. (Except the Lord Do Build this House, page 37), Whatever they might have been feeling the congregation of Swift Current United Church stepped up and updated this building using what they had in front of them.

Haggai was encouraging the high commissioner, the high priest and the Jewish people in Jerusalem (small remnant that they were) to do the same. He spoke on behalf of God saying:

But take courage now, Zerubbabel! – it is YHWH who speaks. Courage, High Priest Joshua ben-Jehozadak! Courage, all you people of the country! – it is YHWH who speaks. To work! I am with you – it is YHWH Omnipotent who speaks – [I am with you] as I promised I would be when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit remains among you. Don't be afraid!"

Haggai reminds the Jewish leaders and their people that they are not alone: that the Hebrew people were not alone when they escaped from Egypt and travelled

through the wilderness, that they were not alone in exile in Babylon and they are not alone in their work to rebuild their temple.

As I was reminded by someone I was visiting in the hospital yesterday, “when the going gets tough, the tough get going.” And we can do that because we have within us the power of a Spirit of Love that is truly omnipotent. We can do that because we know that we don’t have to make it happen all by ourselves.

Haggai continued to speak for God saying,

A little while from now, and I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land. I will shake all the nations, and the treasures of the all the nations will flow in, and I will fill this Temple with glory... The new glory of this Temple is going to surpass the old.”

In fact, the second temple in Jerusalem was completed in the next few years. It was not as big as Solomon’s temple but it became an important place of pilgrimage for the Jewish people. The building was enlarged and expanded by King Herod 500 years later just before the birth of Jesus, and then, sadly, destroyed about 40 years after Jesus died. Today it is still a holy place and there is a Muslim shrine called the Dome of the Rock situated on the site of the original temple. <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20071105JJ.shtml>

When our lives are turned upside-down and we rebuild it is often true that our new life is in some way better than the old. It may not be what we wished for, but in the shaking of our world something different is always created. Sometimes

the gift that we receive is something we can touch like a building and sometimes the gift comes in the form of a new or strengthened faith.

Here at First United Church, we have a beautiful sanctuary that is the envy of many in this town. But it's important to remember that what our building looks like is not what is really important. The treasure, the only glory that matters is the mission of this congregation and how we live out our ministry in this community and in the world. As we move forward, let us remember that we are not alone, that the Spirit of Love is with us and it is amazing what God can do!