

*“Praise for the Holy One”*

*Sermon by Leah Yoo at Brentwood Presbyterian Church*

*Texts: Psalm 145, Haggai 1:15b-2:9, and Luke 20:27-38*

*Sunday November 7, 2010*

This week we are coming up to a public holiday on Remembrance Day (November 11) in Canada to commemorate those killed in war. Nov 11, 1919 was the signing of the Armistice which ended World War I in 1919. It is a day where people continue to hope for peace in a world that is still in conflict and where many people suffer and are displaced. How does one find a way when what they value and cherish are not valued and cherished by others? Even after many years people still struggle to find peace. People continue to look for peace; world leaders continue to meet to talk about peace. But where can one truly find life and peace?

Recently, while I was waiting for the bus I encountered a woman who was still deeply wounded from the dissolution of her twenty plus years of marriage. Not only that, her husband left her to marry a much younger woman. Their marriage ended in October. Understandably, this time of year has been associated with very sorrowful memories of the past and she continued to struggle to find a meaningful life. It didn't make much sense for her and she was still quite angry. She said she prayed and gave her anguish and questions to God about her suffering, betrayal, and the loss of so much. She didn't get the answers she wanted from God and still thinks the door to God was closed to her in prayer. She reached her stop by then and the last thing I quickly thought to say was that God's door was still open.

In today's readings, there is a reminder that in God there is a reason to hope. This is a reminder that Scripture tells the story about a God who is keenly aware of the reality of our world and active in revealing God's plan of action to people. God's creative work begins with a word of hope – a reminder of who God is and who we are.

The prophet Haggai comforts a small grieving community of faith after the desolation and exile to Babylon. The people of Judah had the centre of meaning-making at the Temple in Jerusalem but it was destroyed in 586 BCE. The Temple was the centre of worship and symbolized God's presence among them. Now, the LORD Almighty gave an oracle to rebuild a temple despite adverse political and economic conditions. The people responded with obedience and were led by Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest. Little is known about Haggai, but his name means “festival”. He encouraged them in this part of our reading that God's presence was with them.

Haggai says three times, “Take courage, ” or “Be strong”. This encouragement is needed because God has called them to a task that seems insurmountable. They needed assurance. They need to be faithful to the way God is leading them and helping them to pay attention to what is made known about God and them.

God reminds them that are people of the covenant and that God's Spirit continues to remain on them, to “abide among you” (verse 5). This covenant was

initiated on God's side first long before any of them were around. But this covenant gave them their identity as people of God. This was a covenant established between God and Abraham to be a blessing to the nations and all humankind. God's house would affect humankind so they would recognize God as the true God. Life would be radically different because of a faithful God who would abide with them and be their king. In essence, God would bring glory to God's name. We are made in the image of God. We have human and personal worth. I've learned in school that there is a deep human need of liberation and that God's glory and our good are tied up together. That God is for us, and for our good, and the good of the world.

So what kind of glory goes along with God? The people of God not only praised God in Psalms, but they used creative ways to express God's kingship.

Psalm 145 is one of two acrostics in the Psalms (the other one is Psalm 37). The acrostic was used as a poetic form where each verse of line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In this case, one line is missing (nun). It is also an individual hymn of praise of David who calls people to worship the LORD and gives reasons to praise. David draws attention that God is the King and what God has done and God's character. In this Psalm, they remember and celebrate the LORD with deliberate slow attention individually and corporately in worship. Essentially, God is king over all generations of the Israelites and over all creation and flesh in the Psalms. Psalm 145:8-9 echo God's characteristics in Exodus 34:6-7. Not only is God one who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, but doesn't hold sin against us forever.

The centerpiece of this Psalm is in verses 11-13. In Hebrew these letters are *kaph*, *lamed*, and *mem*. These are the consonantal letters to shape the root word for "king" (*melek*). This is also related to the word for kingdom, which is repeated four times in this passage. God's kingdom is glorious, splendid, and everlasting. God's rule is throughout all generations. Each generation is invited to understand this and invited to praise God.

I truly believe that God's Spirit does this, so each generation in each context can encounter God because God deeply desires to transform the world with holy love. The psalmist continues to describe in active verbs how God is like a king who takes care of those who are under God's care. This gives us every reason to celebrate. God's radical love is because life matters. God's kingly rule does not just warrant respect and praise, but God's authority has transformative power. People are no longer merely subject to rules now for rules hereafter. But, people need to understand how God affirms life and gives assurance of an unknown future. People still ask this question: How can I know that there is a God today? Is there a heaven?

Jesus debates with the Sadducees at the Temple in Jerusalem and he is shown here as a teacher with authority. Luke's narrative shows the confrontations between Jesus and various groups of authorities in the Temple in Luke chapter 20. The Sadducees were a Jewish group that had close ties with the aristocratic and priestly classes. They rejected the oral tradition and did not believe in the resurrection. Luke introduces them with this latter understanding. They ask Jesus a question on levirate marriage practices based on Moses. One commentary suggests that the

people of Israel believed that one lived on through their descendents and in their memory, therefore having children was very important and this also tied in with issues related to property rights.

Yet, underneath this question about the resurrection is really a question about authority. They wanted to know whether or not Jesus followed Moses as God's messenger and law-giver. Yet, Jesus takes on this scenario of a seemingly hypothetical "marital case study" of a widow and seven brothers. Jesus takes this life-or-death issue and firmly shows that God's children are part of the living God, "for to him all are alive".

Children of the resurrection live differently than by the standards of the political or social norms of society even if they are from those who are in central places of power. Jesus identifies this age and an age to come. God's unfolding purpose requires a faithful response to this generation. God was unfolding a new reality with the good news and a reorientation about relationships and what children mean. "God's children no longer die, for they are like angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection." (Luke 20:36).

Hence, Jesus says that even Moses whose teaching were what the Sadducees trusted most, showed that the dead rise because of the identification with the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. What radical assurance of peace between God and one another.

To the woman I met on the bus, I would say to her that her life is more than the success or failure of a marriage. God's plan is that we are in relationship with God and that there is hope in a future where by adoption we all see that God's kingdom is breaking in to this reality to usher in this even today. That God's covenant of grace is from a Living God who brought peace to us through Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the grace to grow is here in this community of faith at Brentwood. May you be encouraged that you that after such struggle and hardships, God is faithfully assuring you to have courage and be strong!!! That God speaks to the leaders and the people and the people can hear that God is with us. This kind of God can bring a resurrection too. It is a mystery! But for every generation God is bringing about renewal and revitalization as we are grounded in the life and work of Jesus Christ. May God lead Brentwood in its next steps to see reality differently.

This is not a task you or I can do alone, but because God is living, moving, and working here amongst you and will open doors for those in this part of the city – in a city where nations are brought here every day. People who are welcomed by a King who seeks to populate the kingdom.

I have real hope that there would be a new kind of building project for God's kingdom – that there would be lives changed for eternity. It's an opportunity to praise the Holy One in this generation and the next of all God's good works. It's an challenge to engage with others who have suffer and feel alienated from God in their times of distress and dislocation, it's an opportunity to engage with those who don't believe in a resurrection to consider where how differently God sees life and death. That God places a firm affirmation on life and flourishing. One cannot grow unless they are rooted in a good foundation.

I thank God that over the past few months of witnessing and experiencing the witness of Brentwood congregation who are reminded again who they you and whose you are. God is faithful to all God's promises and loving toward all he has made and with that remembrance, may we continue to be called to holy living in our example and holy love to engage with prayer, friendship, and invitation to this new task of mission of peace in the world today. By giving praise to God in celebration, we also remember who we are. One generation who will commend your works to another and will tell of your mighty acts through the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.