

Remember The Temple

November 22, 2015 | Patrick Preheim

The church is not what it once was, is it? More and more people seriously question the purpose of organized religion, and they do not always return to the temple. Sure, a few do come back but it is not like past generations.

Now, lest you were thinking I was describing the current state of European and North American mainline Christianity I want to clarify that this is the situation into which Haggai was prophesying. The restoration and continuation of the temple in which there was collective worship of the Lord was the primary concern of Haggai. The temple needed work done on it, and financial backing was hard to find. Temple attendance was down. Jews were largely opting to remain in the posh city of Babylon rather than relocate to the back water town of Jerusalem. Morale was near an all time low. And God, through Haggai, wanted to strengthen the faith of the leaders and lay people still committed to organized religion in Jerusalem.

Build on the foundation, Haggai says. Communion with God's spirit will happen in this sacred space. Things certainly look different than when the ancestors worshipped here, but take courage Zerubbabel. Take courage, Joshua. Take courage. My eternal spirit abides among you. Build in this place and trust. It is a good word. So, take courage Board Chair Trish. Take Courage deacons of our congregation. Take courage those who labour in the church; those who simply take time to attend. God says, my eternal spirit abides among you. Dwell here, worship here and build here, God says.

In the Christian tradition we understand the temple foundation as something other than a physical structure. No other foundation can anyone lay, other than the one laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1st Cor 3.11). It is the phrase I have seen time and time again: in Dutch Mennonite churches, in German Mennonite congregations, in Mennonite writings. Jesus, not theological doctrines, is our foundation. Jesus, not confessions of faith, is our unity. Jesus, not the Ministry of Public Safety, is our security. Jesus, not political policy, is our avenue for service. When we cling to, build up, revere, and practice Jesus the temple gets built within us and among us. The raw materials of this temple construction come through spiritual practices.

Our In Memoriam communion service is a spiritual practice. This communion affirms and celebrates Jesus as a foundation. It gives us space and a concrete action to invite Jesus into our very bodies for the up-building of the kingdom. It draws strength from the ministry of Jesus to his people and through his people across generations and geography. Our loved ones are not gone. Rather, they have been transformed even as we will undergo a change at the time of our death (1st Cor 15.51). Jesus lived and died and lives again offering friendship to the living and the dead. He is our home in this world and the next.

Haggai's people were summoned to remember the love God has for his Temple. The apostle Paul told the early church to remember the love God demonstrated in the foundation of the new Temple—Jesus Christ. We are called to remember that the Spirit of God moves in this place and among us.

It is fitting that in a worship service in which we are invited to remember we would enter into the church's primary ritual of memory—the service of communion. At the table of remembering we recall all that God in Christ has done for us and the world. We are reminded that God holds us in this moment and will watch over us in the future. The memory of God in Christ is eternal: past, present and future. Amen.