

Hi-dee-ho, Tim; It's Not All About You!-- Haggai 1:15b-2:9
Saint Marks United Methodist Church, November 10, 2013

^{1:15b} In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ²“Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, *and to all the remnant of the people*, and say, ³“Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? ⁴Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. *Be strong*, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. *Work, for I am with you*, declares the LORD of hosts, ⁵according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. *My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not!* ⁶For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. ⁷And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and *I will fill this house with glory*, says the LORD of hosts. ⁸The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. ⁹The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.”

Narrator [Rev'd Janet Harman, from the lectern, and then sits down to make room for Tim Taylor to come to lectern]: Today's response to the word of the Lord, through the lips of the prophet Haggai, is set in a contemporary format, by the characters of the television show, *Home Improvement*.

“Tim Taylor,” portrayed by Mark Stotler, is seeking answers to issues in his life. His normal response is often “over-the-top” and usually does not result in what he anticipated. In his frustration over his failures, he usually turns to “Wilson,” the next door neighbor whose face is never seen, but whose wisdom is solid.

If only Tim would consult with Wilson BEFOREHAND, his life would be so much easier. But, then again, the show would probably not have lasted for 9 years if Tim had been reasonable.

Tim Taylor [walking in from side door – looking all around at the many All Saints banners hanging there. He walks as he ogles, up into the lectern area, where he continues his monologue.] **Wow! Just look at all those banners. Those were all saints that used to be part of this church.**

Yeah! Those were the days. 400 banners today means 400 people that used to be here. Add that to the people in church today, and Yowsher! That's a congregation!

- If we could super charge the preacher today, we could get that many people again. You know, let's get his teeth capped, and ask him to smile a lot more. And have him preach simple Bible instructions on how God wants us to live a prosperous life.

- Or, if we made this the “***Downtown Church that feels like success***,” then we could get all of the important political and business people to attend here, you know, to make the right connections.
- Or, if maybe we could get some great big screens and hang down from the ceiling and project pictures and movies on them during worship.
- No, no, I know. We need to rip out that old “new room” and put in a Starbucks. Yeah, that’d get people in here. We could give them a discount card – so if they attend worship for 3 Sundays out of 4 ... no, no, better make it 3 Sundays out of 8 ... they get a discount on their lattes.
- And if we tear out that paving stone prayer thing out in the courtyard, where people just walk in concentric circles, and put in a little amusement park for the kids – yeah, that would really bring them in. The kids could ride rides while the adults went to church. For free!
- And a rock band. We need a rock band for worship. No, maybe, a country band would draw more people. Well, we’ll have to do some demographic studies, to find out which kind of band would have draw more people.
- If I can get this thing through, then maybe the preacher would see just how popular he could be, too, with all these people! And then we could start making some more money in the collection plates. Then we could do more, and get more.
- I’ve got this thing figured out. I wonder if I can get Wilson to come with me to Administrative Board and help push this agenda through. We could turn this church around and get it back to the old glory days.
- Hey, Wilson! Wilson, are you there?

Hi-dee-ho, Tim! Yes, I’m right over here – raking my leaves. I’ve been listening to your plans. Couldn’t help but hear you.

Tim [who walks over to the fence behind which Wilson is working]: **Pretty awesome, yes? Want to come to Administrative Board meeting with me?**

Well, Tim. I’ve got to say. You certainly have a vivid imagination. To hear you tell

it, there's just a remnant of people left. It must feel to you like the Church is going down the drain – just hopeless. Just hopeless.

HOWEVER, my young prognosticator of ecclesiastical prosperity, the REMNANT is an important component in the Kingdom of God that ought not be downplayed or thought of as merely the pittance from which opulence might be propagated.

Throughout the ages, the Lord God YHWH was not always in the business of just working the big numbers.

Once upon a time, the Lord God, YHWH called the Judge, Gideon, into action to lead a charge against the Midianites, who were camped in the valley to the north of the hill Moreh. Gideon had gathered 32,000 troops to mount the attack, and the Lord God said, ***Whoa!! Too many. If you win, then you will give yourselves the credit, instead of me.*** So Gideon sent 22,000 of his troops back home, and kept just 10,000.

And the Lord God said, ***“Now that is a good start, but just a start.”*** So the Lord God gave Gideon a human relations testing mechanism that had not been heard of before, and winnowed the 10,000 down to 300. And then, the Lord God, like a Goldilocks in the three bears' home, said, ***“That's just right.”***

So Gideon and his 300 (down from 33,000) troops departed on what must have seemed like a suicide mission against all of the Midians. But Gideon listened carefully to the “outside the box” plan that God had, and they routed the whole of the Midianites.

You see, my young friend, sometimes God is not so impressed by numbers.

When the prophet ***Haggai*** spoke to the small remnant of Israelites returned from the exile, they were so small in number. They had lost heart. But the prophet spoke the word of the LORD. And he told them to **BE STRONG**, not because there were a lot of them, but because **GOD IS FAITHFUL**. He told them to **NOT BE AFRAID** because **GOD'S SPIRIT WAS WITH THEM**.

If God had wanted nothing but big numbers, he would have made bishops out of Steve Jobs or Bill Gates or Warren Buffet.

Instead of BIG PLANS using business models, my young Bible Business Builder, God wants people to be connected to God. He wants people to spend more time in prayer than in developing Ministry Action Plans, for which they can have one single success and then go on the road telling every other church how they, too, can be the light of the world.

Listen to me, Tim: **IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.** Or any other so-called-expert on church growth.

Jesus said that the **Kingdom of Heaven is not about Towers of Babel, but about little stuff like Salt, Leaven, Light.**

The Psalmist said it like this: ***Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for God gives rest to His beloved***

Listen to me, Tim: IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

- Pray much.
- Live a life that people will want to model for being-in-touch-with God.
- Do good for disadvantaged people that cannot repay you.
- Don't worry about whether it will gain members. Do it, because that's what God calls you to do.

A remnant – a small group of dedicated, praying, giving Christians is a lot more important in God's Kingdom than a great big church that makes itself big by following a business plan, or in making other people little.

You are right, Tim, being small for the sake of being lazy and uncommitted is surely the road to church closing. Both:

- Trying to be big just for the sake of big and bragging rights of success
- And small for the sake of lazy and not stepping out bravely in dependence on God

Both of these are formulas for missing the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus lived to show us.

Tim [scratching his head]: I don't think this reliance upon God and commitment to prayer and sacrificial living is going to sell very well, Wilson.

Wilson: There you go, my young prophet of Haggai-like insight. The real Church has NEVER been the winner of popularity contests. And the Church loses her soul whenever she tries. Jesus NEVER tried to win popularity contests.

Jesus never appealed to populist campaigns nor made allegiance with any national or political agenda.

We just do what God tells us, and let God take care of the success. It's not measured in just numbers. Jesus said it's about bearing good fruit.

Why don't you pray about this, and read some more of those words from Haggai. Just be like salt and leaven and light, Tim. It's not about you; it's not about being popular; it's about being holy – not prudish, but holy.

**JANET: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
AMEN.**