Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

November 10, 2019

Old Testament Reading; Haggai 2: 1-9

Responsive Reading; Psalm 145: 1-5, 17-21

Epistle Reading; 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-5, 13-17

Gospel Reading; Luke 20: 27-38

Sermon Title: STAND FAST

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Stand on traditions and solid teaching when being assaulted by “alternative gospels” that are untested.

Today’s message is presented in three different genres. First the four scriptures, second the three hymns and thirdly, and definitely the least, the sermon.

In our first scripture from Haggai, the scene is after some of the Hebrews return to rebuild the temple after the Babylonian exile. They have worked diligently for quite some time with little to show for it and they are discouraged.

Haggai, the prophet, is told by God to encourage the supervisors and workers. The translation called The Message, puts it this way.

“So, get to work, Zerubbabel’ God is speaking.

“Get to work, Joshua son of Jehozadak-high priest!”

Get to work, all you people’ – God is speaking.

“Yes, get to work! For I am with you.’ The God of the Angel Armies is speaking! ‘Put into action the word I covenanted with you when you left Egypt. I’m living and breathing among you right now. Don’t be timid. Don’t hold back.’ “This is what the God of Angel Armies said: ‘Before you know it, I will shake up sky and earth, ocean and fields. And I’ll shake down all the godless nations. They’ll bring bushels of wealth and I will fill this Temple with splendor’ God of the Angel Armies says so.

‘I own the silver; I own the gold.’ Decree of God of the Angel Armies.

This Temple is going to end up far better than it started out, a glorious beginning but an even more glorious finish: a place in which I will hand out wholeness and holiness.’ Decree of God of the Angel Armies.”

Now if you want to update this passage, take out the words “this temple” and insert, “This Nation”, “This education system”, “This status of Christianity in the world”, “This family unit”, or any of the other value systems that is under attack in this age.

Yes, things are rough right now but the “God of the Angel Armies” is still right with us. He is with us just as He was when Moses crossed the Red Sea and when Jesus walked the dusty roads of Galilee. Things look bleak but all things are possible with God and like those people addressed in Haggai we need to believe it and believe in it.

How should we believe it and in it? We need to follow the example of our Psalms reading.

Extol God, bless God’s name, Praise God’s name for His greatness is unsearchable. Pass on this attitude of praise from one generation to the next. For the Lord is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works, and near to all who call upon Him in truth. He will be with us and He will preserve all who love Him.

Our Epistle lesson speaks to what I put in the summary of this message warning us to not get caught up in what I call “false gospels”.

Let me again use the Message to put a different vocabulary on the lesson from the New King James Version. Here goes:

*‘Now, friends, read these next words carefully. Slow down and don’t go jumping to conclusions regarding the day when our Master, Jesus Christ will come back and we assemble to welcome him. Don’t let anyone shake you up or get you excited over some breathless report of rumored letter from me that the day of the Master’s arrival has come and gone. Don’t fall for any line like that.*

*Before that day comes, a couple of things have to happen. First, the Apostasy. Second, the debut of the Anarchist, a partner in crime with Satan. He’ll defy and then take over every so-called god or altar. Having cleared away the opposition, he’ll then set himself up in God’s Temple as “God Almighty.” Don’t you remember me going over all this in detail when I was with you? Are your memories that short?*

 *Meanwhile, we’ve got our hands full continually thanking God for you, our good friends-so loved by God! God picked you out as his from the very start. Think of it: included in God’s original plan of salvation by the bond of faith in the living truth. This is the life of the Spirit he invited you to through the Message we delivered, in which you get in on the glory of our Master, Jesus Christ.*

*So, friends, take a firm stand, feet on the ground and head high. Keep a tight grip on what you were taught, whether in personal conversation or by our letter. May Jesus himself and God our Father, who reached out in love and surprised you with gifts of unending help and confidence, put a fresh heart in you, invigorate your work, enliven your speech.’*

Here it is where it gets heavy. Paul tells the people of Thessalonica that they were chosen by God for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit for obtaining the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is to make God’s promises come true on earth. Guess what. Paul is also talking directly to us in this little church, in this little community and in this great big world.

God is not soliciting the services of Presidents and Prime Ministers; God is calling us. What’s more God is equipping us. If you do not believe me just read the Face Book posts of our beloved Lynn.

Lynn was supposed to die of cancer ten years ago but not only has he survived this long he has journaled his entire journey. He admits the problems but emphasizes the “Pearls”, the good things, his faith in God and in God’s plan for him. And now he has grandchildren picking up the slack and praising God even though they will not have their beloved grandpa for much longer.

God is using Lynn to show us how to maintain our strength and faith in spite of the circumstances. In our Psalm reading Psalm 145:4, “One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.” And verse 5; “I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works.” Thessalonians ends this lesson saying, “God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.”

Did you catch that? God not only comforts our hearts He establishes us to do every good word and more importantly every good work. We do not do good works to obtain salvation, we do good works that God created for us to do. That is why “God from the beginning chose [us] for salvation through the spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called [us] by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught.”

The gospel tells of the stupid questions we will be asked and shows how we will need to stand fast to our faith and our traditions. The world is a mess but God has commissioned us to do our part in turning it around.

And the glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former says the Lord of Hosts.

Hallelujah and Amen