

Haggai 2:1-9

October 23, 2011 – PENTECOST 19, Stewardship 4

Strong Promises for Hard Workers✠ **“I am with you.” (vv.1-5)**✠ **“I will fill this house with glory.” (vv.6-7)**✠ **“In this place I will grant peace.” (vv.8-9)**

In the name of Jesus, our Prince of Peace and Master Builder, dear fellow workers in God’s kingdom:

North on I-35 the signs ask a question: “What’s your Grand Casino story?” Exit at Highway 48 onto Fire Monument Road. Don’t go left to the Fire Museum, but head east about a mile. Most know the south side is where “Grand Casino stories” are written. But what’s across Highway 48 on the north side? It’s hard to believe it could be so small near the site of Minnesota’s most deadly fire on September 1st, 1894. But there it is, dwarfed by the Grand Casino across the highway, the First Presbyterian Church. If you ever wanted to see America’s priorities, compare those two. Where is America’s heart?

God’s people feel so small working on our houses of worship, worshiping God with trusting hearts. How hard it was for God’s people back from captivity in Babylon to clear rubble and rebuild God’s temple in Jerusalem. Some think if they had “Grand Casino stories,” maybe they could do more. But if money were the answer, projects like Solyndra would not go belly up. What we need comes from God and is worth more than all the world’s wealth. We need: **Strong Promises for Hard Workers.**

✠ **“I am with you.” (vv.1-5)**

Since most everyone knows the Spanish for “house” is “casa,” let me tell some “grand casa stories” to illustrate the three points of this sermon. The first we’ll call, “Panic on the Stem Walls.” It was early morning. My older brother Roc and I were hurrying to get ready for the cement truck. As teenagers, this was our first major pour without supervision. We nearly had everything ready when I had a panicked thought. *How will we get the stem wall forms out of the ground after the cement hardens?* We had banded both sides of our forms together. I so wished my brother had not listened to me. “Mark, that’s a dumb idea,” would have been a good answer. After we cut all the bottom bands, the pouring cement naturally burst the forms. We had to send the truck away, but the driver was so gracious. “I won’t charge you,” he said. “I have another delivery down the road.” We were 22 miles out of town.

To inexperience add some problems with the neighbors, and panic sets in real quick. Imagine Governor Zerubbabel in the middle of this new building project on a foundation laid sixteen years before. The surrounding Samaritans got the government to stop them. Now everyone could see the walls going up about as impressive as a Christian church across from a casino. Members had similar feelings when New Life was new. We needed God’s Word like the Jewish governor, high priest Joshua and people. So sweet and simple. God says, **“I am with you.”** In His command is the power to... **“Be strong....Be strong....Be strong, all you people of the land,” declares the LORD, ‘and keep working. For I am with you,’ declares the LORD Almighty. “This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.”** (TPA) Those words soothed like our Lutheran principal coming over to our sun blistered building on the teacherage. He was carrying ice cold malts. Ah!

✠ **“I will fill this house with glory.” (vv.6-7)**

God does not want us to despise the little things. He wants us to respect Him for His honor and to honor Him in our leaders. Sometimes that’s hard to do, especially when they make mistakes.

Call this next story, “Framing Your Errors.” We built our teacherage in Bend, Oregon, on donated labor. My Granddad SeEVERS donated mine and my brother’s. A congregation member said he was a contractor who would teach us all to lay blocks. But five courses up on the basement, one wall was 2” too long and another 4” too short, with the top rippling in all directions. What a mess of mortar it took to

correct that. And when it came to the framing, I could not convince our member contractor that we did not need the “Opt.” box above one of the bedroom windows. As a teenager, I wanted to honor him, but everyone said that beam could not go there. The garage was on ground level; the half-basement put the first floor above the garage. The optional beam would connect with thin air. I obeyed and framed it in. The sheeting and siding covered it anyway. No harm done. The contractor finally left the congregation.

God will never give up on us. He wants us never to give up on Him. We really need to stop and pray when we think we know better than someone else. We all have opinions, but as the LORD says in Proverbs: **“Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.”** (13:10 NIV84) And the best advice will always come from our God whose plans far exceed our tiny imagination.

Who knew what God meant for those Jewish builders? **“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty.”** They had heard about Mount Sinai shaking when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. But who could have guessed the Glory of God would stand in this new temple about four centuries later in the Person of God’s own Son? All the glory of Herod’s remodeling could not hold a candle to the brightness of Jesus who shines God’s glory in the full and free forgiveness of our sins, including our worry, anxiety, pride, prejudice, fear and foolishness. God’s final **“once more”** He explains (Hebrews 12:25-29) as removing created things. On the Last Day Hinckley’s fire will look like a tiny match.

✠ **“In this place I will grant peace.” (vv.8-9)**

With God’s great promises we don’t need “Grand Casino stories,” but another “grand casa story” will do. Back at Granddad’s house, you could barely tell where the stem walls blew out. Our next major pour was the garage floor, and we were determined to make it smooth. Since we had a youth campout in the mountains that weekend, we put heavy plastic over our beautiful cement floor as storm clouds gathered. Out of sight, out of mind all weekend, but Dad told us the hail came down like golf balls that night. Sure enough, pulling back the plastic on Monday revealed a textured floor, “Craters of the Moon.”

Viewed in the light of God’s Word, I see a lesson in that. Here’s what the LORD Almighty says, **“The silver is mine and the gold is mine. The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,” says the LORD Almighty. “And in this place I will grant peace,” declares the LORD Almighty.** No amount of money can keep the clouds away. One architect told us that if you want to see the cracks in the congregation, just start a building project. What we need is God’s promise: **“In this place I will grant peace.”** How could we do better than the Prince of Peace? His divine **peace** surpasses all understanding as He comes to us in Word and sacrament. So refreshing!

Some people mistake “peace” for the absence of strife. But the story of that contest between two artists helps us see. One pictured “peace” in a still life scene with nothing out of place and nothing real. The other painted a raging rapid. There on a branch above the white water was a tiny bird singing its sweet song. He was at “peace” in spite of trouble below. Reminds me of what Martin Luther liked to call his “favorite preacher.” The little bird outside his window would sing all day to the Creator, then tuck his tiny head beneath his wing at night and go to sleep. Jesus **“himself is our peace.”** (Ephesians 2:14)

Strong Promises for Hard Workers are like God taking us by the hand. Then everything is okay. Remember last week when Norma and Gordon Yeager were rushed to the hospital? They were kept together in intensive care, lying side-by-side holding hands. Neither was responsive. When Gordon quietly passed away, the nurse was surprised because his monitor still read as if his heart were beating. She figured it out. “Her heart was beating through him and [the monitor] was picking it up.” One hour after her husband, Norma passed away. Both in their 90’s, 72 years of marriage, they died holding hands.

¹ Our heavenly Bridegroom, our Prince of Peace, will never let go the hand of His bride. Amen.

¹ <http://theweek.com/article/index/220645/72-years-together-the-couple-who-died-holding-hands> – posted 10/21/2011.