

“God of the Living” Haggai 1:15b-2:9; Luke 20:27-38; 11/11/2007; Albany UMC

In the history of Israel, there had been three temples in Jerusalem. The first one was built by King Solomon in about 1000 BC. This temple stood for about 400 years on the top of Mt. Moriah until 586 BC when it was destroyed by the Babylon. After the destruction, people were taken into exiles.

About 70 years later, the second temple was built by Zerubbabel when his people returned from the Babylonian exiles. But this temple was not quite good as the first one. So King Herod enlarged the temple site as a way of buying people’s hearts. But this third temple was destroyed in 70 AD again when there was a Jewish rebellion against the Roman Empire. If you go to Jerusalem, you will see what they call “The Wailing Wall.”

When I was there a couple of weeks ago, it was very emotional to see some people pray with their hands on the Wall. I also spent some time praying there with my hands on the Wall. While many people pray and read scriptures, some other people celebrate their sons’ “Bar Mitzbah”—the celebration of the 13th birthday. It was quite a scene to see.

Since then Israel has never built their Temple again. Right now, there is an Islamic Temple called “the Dome of the Rock” on the spot where the temple used to be.

So what the Jewish people have left is the Wall, the Wailing Wall. But it is not even a part of the temple; it is a part of the wall constructed by King Herod 2000 years ago to support the temple platform.

But that is one of the holiest places not only to the Jewish people but to people who visit there from all over the world.

In order for us to get in there, we had to wear a Kippa that was available at the entrance. Men and women are not allowed to go in there together. The place is divided into two: one for men and another for women.

In today’s Old Testament text, the prophet Haggai talks about his frustration while he is trying to rebuild the temple. He was one of the prophets when they were in the midst of rebuilding the second temple. They had to stop the project

several times because there were all kinds of internal and external oppositions. Some people were laughing at the leaders saying that what they needed was not the Temple, but foods.

People were so blind to their physical needs that they did not see what God wanted them to do.

But God is saying to them through the mouth of Haggai:

“Take courage, Zerubbabel, the governor. Take courage also, Jushua, the high priest. All you people of the land take courage and work, I am with you. My Spirit is with you, do not fear!” In 1:8, God says, “Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the Temple that I may be pleased with it and be glorified.”

But once the Temple was complete, the temple became God to some people. The temple is just a place of worship; it cannot be a god. Since Jesus died on the cross, we became the temple where the Spirit of God resides; and the members of the congregation become the church, not the building. (Eph 2:21)

In today’s gospel, Jesus is dealing with a group of people called Sadducees.

These people were those who came from the upper classes—mainly priestly families and lay families with whom the priests had intermarried. Unlike Pharisees who were also a power group, the Sadducees did not believe in any spiritual things such as the existence of angels and evil powers, not to mention the eternal life. They are just giving Jesus a hard time by asking the question of who becomes whose wife. But they did not believe any of these.

Their goal for life was the enjoyment of life in this world. They did not have any reason to look for another world; they had every thing in the world and they were happy with it.

No wonder that with the destruction of the Temple the Sadducees have disappeared from history.

To these Sadducees, Jesus says: God is not God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him. In other words, those who died in faith died but live; those

who have gone before us are gone, but stay with God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died but they are with God. People like you and me die but live to God because our life does not end here.

What Jesus is saying is, however, not just the doctrine of eternal life. What he points out is the doctrine of present life. What the Sadducees cared about was themselves: their welfare, their enjoyment, and the future of their own children only. To them, religion was only a means to have all of these earthly blessings for themselves. If our life were only for this, Jesus would not have died on the cross.

Jesus wants us to look beyond. He wants us to be the living, not the dead. As the people of God, we are to live our life here in this world with our future in our minds.

Jesus' vision was to bring the Kingdom of God down to the earth. His vision was to bridge between people and God and between peoples who were separated.

One of the most frustrating things when we were in Israel was to see the second Wall, not the Wailing Wall but a new wall. The wall is the fence the Israeli government put in the West Bank between Palestinian communities and Jewish settlers. The wall is causing hardship to tens of thousands of Palestinian people who live in Jerusalem and their immediate neighbors in the surrounding West Bank.

Just imagine there are 24 feet high concrete walls alongside Marin Ave here in Albany. Some of the children on this side have to go through check points to go to school on the other side of town every day. Some trucks from the other side have to come through the same check points to deliver milk and bread to their customers on this side every morning. To many Christians and Muslims in the area, life was just miserable.

I know there are some times terrorist attacks and suicide bombings. But all of us who went there agreed that the fence would never solve the problems. The United States is paying billions of dollars to Israel for this every year.

We need to look beyond our walls; we need to look beyond the boundary of our ideologies. We need to be awakened of what we are doing.

We need to think what Jesus would do if he was here. We become the living people only when we can picture this and try to become a part of his vision in this world.

God is the God of the living; God wants us to be awakened; God wants us to be alive; God wants us to see what He sees in what we are doing.

May the living God bless us that our thoughts and lives come alive.

Amen.