

Sermon: “**Bridge Over Troubled Water**” by Pastor Chris Eng
Lectionary Text (UCC Desk Calendar): Haggai 1: 15b - 2:9, N.R.S.V.
Sunday, November 6, 2022 at 10:00 a.m.
Kailua Christian Church UCC: Stewardship Sunday

SCRIPTURE READING: HAGGAI 1:15b – 2:9 nrsv

¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.

The Future Glory of the Temple

In the second year of King Darius, ² ¹ in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: ² “Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say: ³ Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? ⁴ Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, ⁵ according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. ⁶ For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land, ⁷ and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. ⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. ⁹ The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts, and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts.”

Introduction: I came across a card with the words of Bridge Over Troubled Water written by hand. The personal note read, “Thank you for the times when you were my “Bridge” - your concern and patience really helped me. I only hope that you’ll let me be your ‘bridge over troubled waters’ when things are going badly for you.” This seems to be the perfect song for today’s sermon at KCC.

I asked what the members and friends of Kailua Christian Church UCC are experiencing in the present. The response was this: some feel anxious over who will be the next settled pastor as well as the church’s future. Members are getting older and have more medical challenges. There are less candidates to serve in leadership positions. Who could be the bridge for you, if you are facing troubled waters? And who or what might be the bridge for the church?

Opening my bible to the first Lectionary text for today in my UCC Desk Calendar, the words of the prophet Haggai leaped out at me!

“Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now?” (verse 3)

“Take courage all you people” says the Lord, “I am with you. My spirit abides among you and do not fear.” (verse 4)

“The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former and in this place I will give you prosperity.” (verse 9)

Looking Back at the Past. Do you remember the ‘glory days’ of Kailua Christian Church?

Perhaps you can look back and recall a person who was the pastor or teacher, youth advisor or friend who really made a difference in your life and the church's. But also get in touch with the feelings of loss when this individual left the church or could no longer be here. It was 520 B.C. when the prophet Haggai had returned with the exiles imprisoned during the Babylonia captivity. They faced the daunting task of clearing away the rubble of the destruction of Jerusalem that included the temple. It was physically and emotionally demoralizing. Perhaps some of you can identify with Haggai. You see what the church has gone through in losing pastors, in dealing with members leaving, in the recent pandemic. It suddenly occurred to me that this is what the church should be looking for in a pastor: someone like the prophet Haggai who had experienced the devastation of God's house!

Taking Time to Be Present with the Present. This week, Mid-Week featured a mindful moment with Alice Inoue with the caption, "Life Is Hard For A Reason." She asks, "Have you ever experienced something and later realized that had you not, you would not have compassion for what another is going through?" She says, "I think that our own painful experiences serve to deepen our capacity for humility, consideration, and empathy." For the people listening to the words of the prophet Haggai, they were reminded that God was with them and God's Spirit abides in them so they shouldn't fear. At this present time, KCC is going through a very rough patch. We will be reminded when Advent arrives as we sing, "Oh Come, Oh Come Emmanuel" that God is always with us!" God comes to us in the birth of Jesus who would grow up and experience life as a human being. This is the second characteristic to look for in a pastor: someone who not only has experienced daunting and discouraging times but also has found the presence of God in the midst of the turmoil!

Having Hope in the Future. Haggai prophesies by telling his people that the new temple (house) that they build shall be greater than the former temple that was destroyed and that God promises prosperity. I wonder if you can believe that in the future, you may not recognize Kailua Christian Church because of how God will bring about a transformation that is incomparable with how God worked in the past. Although much of what is seen today is decline, loss, and having to let go of what we wished we could hold on to, we must have faith. This is the third qualification of the pastor you are seeking: someone who looks to the future and can see how God will revitalize this church and in this has faith!

Conclusion. The song ends with the encouraging words, "Sail on, silver girl, Sail on by. Your time has come to shine. All your dreams are on their way. See how they shine. If you need a friend. I'm sailing right behind. Like a bridge over troubled water. I will ease your mind."

The church has been a bridge to some of us during a troubling time. Some of us have been a bridge for someone else, when they needed a friend. And for others, there has been a person who was like a bridge when we were experiencing troubled waters ourselves.

In what ways can KCC be a bridge over troubled waters? The church has many outreach ministries. Have you ever felt like reaching out to someone going through a tough time to be this bridge? The spirit may have led you to someone. Or perhaps you are going through a challenging time right now and need someone to be a bridge for you. I was reminded that next Sunday is Stewardship Sunday. Stewardship is understanding what gifts God has given us and using these gifts wisely for the ministry of Christ's church. For the Pastoral Search Committee, it is to discern the candidates and possibly find that person who is much like the prophet Haggai...such

an awesome task! For all members and friends of KCC, it is to be a “bridge over troubled water” to someone in need. And it is to let others know when you need someone to be a “bridge” for you like the person I mentioned in the introduction.

Pastoral Prayer for Communion Sunday.

Let us pray: God who loves us with an everlasting love, we give thanks for Kailua Christian Church UCC and for those who minister to us today. You know the names of our leaders and volunteers, those who have answered the call to be a servant, following in the footsteps of Jesus the Christ as his disciple. We especially appreciate those who have served this year and those who have said, “Yes” to the invitation to serve the church for 2023.

God who hears our requests for prayer, we lift up those who are struggling with some medical challenge. May they find the support they need, the intervention that addresses their pain and suffering and a positive attitude to do what is necessary. We include those in this sanctuary as well as those on Zoom. Hear our prayers for other needs that have come to our attention.

God who calls us to be good stewards, make us aware of the spiritual gifts that you have given us. Enlighten us to the resources that some of us have so that we can share with your church. Speak to us through your Holy Spirit as we discern how to use our time, our talent and our treasure. We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus the Christ, Amen.