



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, February 2, 2020
The Presentation of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Blessing of Light and Solemn Evensong
at 4:00 p.m.

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Ryan Bennett, *Assisting Priest*
on
Haggai 2:1-9 and 1 John 3:1-8
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Only Love Can Do That

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”

– Martin Luther King Jr.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speaks to the heart of the matter. Light is the force, which transforms all darkness. No better reason on this Feast of the Presentation to purposely bless the light, which illumines our church this evening. For in blessing the light we intentionally take into our lives the light that has the true power to drive out darkness and transform hate into love. Love which ministers a balm to hate – so that hate can no longer have a monopoly over our lives!

In the words of John’s Gospel – “The light is the light of the world, Jesus!”

The Israelites of 520 BCE knew what it was like to live amidst the darkness of bondage and degradation. The Prophet Haggai writes for us about the experience of newly discovered freedom. King Darius of Persia signs a decree to allow captive Israelites to return to their homelands following the Babylonian exile.

The people are given a restricted amount of local government as long as they remain loyal to King Darius. We feel the mixed emotions of newly discovered freedom mixed with resentment in the light of continuing to live on the tightly held string of a foreign King.

Haggai tells the people; God is aware of the challenges in shaping a new nation under these terms. The ethnic civil leader of the community, Zerubbabel and Joshua, the hierarchical leader face a tall order,

“Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?”

In the wake of forging new beginnings comes the first opportunity to acknowledge the scale of destruction of former wars and subsequent exile. The people have one eye steered towards the future, yet feel the raw emotion of loss as they remember the glory of days of their homeland. Most pertinently, the destruction of their temple, the heart of their spiritual and civil life;

In grief, the people are cynical about re building the temple. In their minds, nothing can replace the Temple of Solomon. Any attempt will be a mere rubble. Haggai speaks to their understandable cynicism;

“I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts.”

“Shake the Heavens, shake the Earth” If the Israelites were taking a 101 course in Motivational therapy, they are under no illusion about God’s desire to act on their behalf! The prophet Haggai is an A grade motivational dinner speaker in advocating for their true interests...

God’s desire is for the Temple to be rebuilt and be a place of splendor. However, not for the reasons, the people think. Haggai challenges the people to think outside the walls! What will make the temple a place of true splendor is the promise that god will abide there among God’s people. This is the hope, which will restore the wills of a broken people.

A motivation to the re build the temple, so once again it can be the center of their spiritual and civic life.

The Author of the First letter of John builds on this sense of promise by declaring to the early Johannine church. They share the same experience of dissension and grief, which faced Haggai’s community.

Amidst challenging times for this emerging church, the author is castigating those who have not kept the Law of love.

A summary of The Law of love is this; Jesus is light and life from the Father made manifest in human flesh. God dwelling with God’s people in human form. For John’s community, this truth reveals what the capacity of love truly is. An in breaking of love into what is broken and breathe new life.

“See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us, is that it did not know him.”

These early Christians have already experienced God’s goodness in becoming the children of God. That said, they have experienced the isolation and exclusion for believing Jesus is the long expected fulfilment of divine Promise.

The promise Simeon and Anna both recognize in seeing in this child as the hope of Israel. The affirmation of wise holy people, mixed with expectations, hope of young parents, Mary and Joseph – meet in a moment-manifested glory – the Light, and Life of the world is shining!

John’s community have a creedal formula for life in Christ, which speaks to us now;

1. Christians do not belong to the world
2. Christians are called to lead lives of holiness like Jesus
3. Christians are confident of greater things

In believing these things, we are not meant to live apart from the world, rather with these truths at the heart of who were, they shape how we see the world. How we see the world and how we interpret our place in it. This is the Joy of the Incarnation – Light and Life truly alive in human form.

This life, this light has power to transform darkness. It is the ability to transform hate. Let your light Shine!