

“The Wrong Question”
Luke 20:27-38, Haggai 1:15b-2:9
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The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings

What's going to happen? What will our lives be like when we wake up on Wednesday morning? If the last week has taught us anything it is that if the Cubs can win the World Series, then anything can happen. But maybe that's what frightens us. Anything could happen, and what if what happens is not something that we want? What if what happens this week is something that we have feared all along? What then? Who's going to win this election? And what will we do then?

I can't tell you the answer to those questions and I'm certainly not going to tell you for whom to vote. But I am going to tell you that I believe that opting out is not a faithful response. I hope you have heard God's call to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ and that part of that call is to be a responsible citizen: to pray for our leaders, to care for God's creation, to work for justice and peace, to promote social righteousness. If that is our call then, taking part, prayerfully and actively, is incumbent upon us. And voting is certainly part of that.

The prophet Haggai is one of the biblical writers that we can date with some accuracy. Given that he tells us about a certain period during the reign of the Persian King Darius, we think that Haggai was preaching during the period between August and December in 520 BC. The people of Israel had recently returned from a generation in exile in Babylon and they were at work rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. Or at least part of it. Haggai looked around at the people rebuilding their own homes and not doing anything about rebuilding the Temple, and so he asks, “Who is left among you that saw the temple in its former glory? Doesn't it look like nothing now?” The people had decided that their best days were behind them, that they would never be the great nation they had been. And so each person works on their own project, each to care for me and mine. Meanwhile, they all forget about the temple and the values that the temple stand for: praise and worship of the God who had set them free; and care

for the neighbor with heart, mind and soul, as one cares for themselves.¹

So the question, “Who knows what this used to look like?” is the wrong question. Haggai is not simply telling them that they need to get to work rebuilding the temple so that they have a worship space. He is calling them to account for not rebuilding the community of the children of God. His concern is not a building, but the covenant community. Because that is our temptation during times of national strife or upset. We're going to focus on ourselves. I'm going to make sure I get mine. “Remember what it used to be like when times were good?” is the wrong question.

The same thing happens in the time of Jesus. He is approached by the Sadducees who want to ask him a trick question. They ask him a question about the resurrection when they themselves do not believe in the resurrection. So they come up with this convoluted situation. According to the Law in the Hebrew Scriptures, if a man dies and he leaves a widow behind him and they have not yet had children, it is the obligation of the man's brother to marry his widow and have children with her. That way he will not lose his inheritance of the land. So they come up with a situation about a woman who goes through seven brothers and then ask, if the resurrection is true, if these people are raised from the dead, whose wife will she be? What's going to happen in the resurrection? What is heaven going to be like? If there is a resurrection, will I have the things I have now? Again the wrong questions.

“The questions we need to be asking of Jesus this Sunday and this Tuesday and the following Wednesday aren't whose wife will that woman be in the resurrection, but who is caring for her now?”

In the book “Just Mercy” by Bryan Stevenson he talks about some of the clients he works with who are in prison and on death row. He writes about one man, Herbert, who he has been sitting with in the hours before his execution. Herber says, “All day long people have been asking me, 'what can I do to help you?' When I woke up this morning, the kept coming to me, 'Can we get you some breakfast?' All day long, 'What can we do to help you? Do you need stamps for your letters? Do you want water? Do you want coffee? Can we get you the phone? How can we help you?' It's been so strange Bryan. More

¹ Sterne, Martha. *Feasting on the Word, Year C, volume 4*. p. 271.

people have asked me what they can do for me in the last fourteen hours of my life than ever asked me in the years when I was coming up.” Stevenson says, “Where were these people when he really needed them? Where were all these helpful people when Herbert was three and his mother died? Where were they when he was seven and trying to recover from physical abuse? Where were they when he was a young teen struggling with drugs and alcohol? Where were they when he returned from Vietnam traumatized and disabled.”²

Where were those concerned about the widow's status in the resurrection when she was struggling on earth?

We too are asking the wrong questions? What's going to happen on Tuesday? What will we do on Wednesday when we wake up and have to deal with the results of this election? The same thing we are doing today. Our questions is not so much about what will happen on Wednesday but how we can be faithful on Wednesday. How can we build up the body of Christ and work with God to create a covenant community of prayer and healing and almsgiving and sacrificial love?

Don't get me wrong, I believe it matters who will be president, and who will be representative and judges and sherrif and county clerk. But our call as the people of God remains the same.

On Wednesday when the election is over, what will be our concern? Same as it is today. We should not be fearful, alarmed, or shaken because we are following our God who is faithful, in control, and life giving. We should be concerned not so much with who wins, but with those who are lost. No matter what happen this week, or in the future, whether we live or die in fact, no matter what, we are the Lord's and so are the vulnerable widows, and those on death row, and even those who voted differently than we did, and God calls all of us to come to this table and to share and care for each other. Our call to be the gathered community of Christ, showing his love, caring for the least, preaching the good news of life abundant, and building up other, will not change no matter who is President.

2 Duffield, Jill. *Reflections on the Lectionary*. October 31, 2016