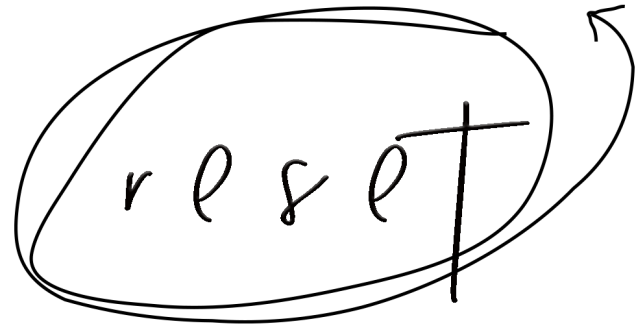


RENEW. REBUILD. RETURN. REVEAL.  
RESTORE. REIMAGINE. RESET.  
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RENEW. REBUILD. RETURN. REVEAL.  
RESTORE REIMAGINE RESET.



## Haggai 1 & 2 - Reset Us

Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it. This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. God up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured," says the Lord. "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the Lord Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of your is busy with your own house." (Haggai 1:3-9)

'Who or you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong, Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord. 'Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the Lord, 'and work. 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.' 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 what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. '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. (Haggai 2:3-9)

Places of worship are as old as recorded history: as simple as stones piled on top of one another, paintings in a cave, or a sacred tree or statue, through to a gothic cathedral. Every culture, across the span of history, has crafted its sacred spaces.

For Israel, you could say it all began with a burning bush: "Take off your sandals, (God said to Moses in Exodus 3.5) for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

Years later it was a tent: God says to Moses, in Exodus 25:8-9: "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. A simple tent pitched outside the camp - the tent of God's presence, a point where heaven and earth met.

Fast-forward to King David in 2 Samuel 7: David is sitting in his cedar panelled palace one night (interesting parallel to the panelled houses of Haggai 1) and he has a brain wave. He says to himself: "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent." I will build God a house too. Prophet Nathan says "yay", but then gets a message back from the lord - to paraphrase - "I've never asked for a house of cedar! I asked for a tent not a temple! I've never needed one before and How can you build a house for me?" He then goes on to say, "I'll build you the house - only its not a building but a lineage", which would eventually include Jesus. Even though God did not ask for a temple, something that is repeatedly evident through the old testament is that God accommodates faulty human thinking (but that's a sermon for our next series).

Eventually the task falls to David's son, King Solomon, to build the temple that God never asked for. It was a magnificent structure in Jerusalem, gleaming with gold and silver and precious stones - the focal point of the nation's worship life and identity for hundreds of years. Until it is utterly destroyed by the Babylonians in 586. The modern equivalent of the twin towers in New York crashing down...

Fast forward to 520 and, as we've been reading in Haggai, a new temple is being built to replace Solomon's. Haggai has hinted at the greater glory that this temple would have, but on paper it was a 3-star motel replacing to a 5-star resort. A fraction of the size and detail. Haggai is already pointing this out to those who remembered the first, it seemed like nothing compared to Solomon's.

Now you could assume that they didn't have the cash or the resources or the freedom to make it that great, and that may be partly accurate, but in truth for the next 500 years through to its destruction in AD 70, great kings with great egos could have done great work on it, yet all seem to have shown considerable restraint. Perhaps there is something else going on here? Some divine providence holding back on the bling maintaining its modesty? After all, what did the first temple produce: A nation devoted to Yahweh, embodying the commands, fulfilling the covenant? Not at all. The grandness of Solomon's temple, which mimicked many of the temples of other gods of the time, may have been an edifice that they were proud of, but it had had the opposite effect on their soul. The reason we are told they went into exile, and indeed the reason why God permits the Babylonians to destroy the temple, was because Israel had become full of idolatry and religious syncretism. They had, once again, crafted their God to look a lot like the counterfeits of the surrounding nations.

So for the God who said, "a tent will do just fine", Haggai's temple seems more in keeping with that intent. A structure, not indulgent nor ornate, not pointing to its own splendour, but sufficient for the purposes of worship and the maintaining of a spiritual culture in the lives of the individual, and the community.

Fast forward to an upper room not far from this temple: those gathered are waiting and praying, air of expectancy in the room because the Messiah had promised that his presence would no longer be in the temple but come into them. And then it happens: like a rushing wind and fire, Luke, in the first chapter of Acts, attempts to put words to this divine invasion into the hearts of all who gathered. Everything changed from that time on.

Fast forward a year or so later to a small community of people named after their leader: these 'Christians' were both Jews and Gentiles, men, women, slave and free, gathering together in open spaces and in homes. They were known for their deep devotion to one another, to prayer, to remembering and celebrating their risen saviour around a meal, and to the teaching of the apostles. They were becoming known for their generosity to one another and in time their sacrificial compassion in the world.

Sure, they could still be seen around the temple precinct from time to time, but the temple was no longer the place of his presence nor the symbol of their identity. They were learning that the great mystery being revealed was Christ in you: God's dwelling place not in a structure, but in a life. The God who said, "A tent will do just fine," because wherever the 12 tribes were, God's presence could be. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 would even refer to us as a tent, and wherever we are, there God's presence could be - be it in the individual, but even more gloriously in the community of God.

And both Peter and Paul explain the effect of God in each individual: that together as a people we become the new temple where heaven and earth meet. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:4-5: *As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

Paul said in Ephesians 2:21-22: *In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Can you fathom how amazing this is? Some people hope for a new temple to be built in Jerusalem, but you and I are literally a part of the new temple God is building and making His home among us. The sacred space is not a building that we have to recreate, it's a new-creation-people who, together, are a living expression of His presence. Isn't that incredible! Doesn't that make you think twice about criticising the church or thinking that you can be a brick all by yourself? You and I, together, are part of a brilliant plan, chosen before the foundation of the earth to be holy and blameless in His sight to love Him, live in Him and reveal Him to the world.

As I said in the last episode, your relationship with Jesus is intimately connected to your relationship with Jesus' people. The church is God's idea and in God's wisdom, by being included and joined together in His living house:

- Together, we worship to Him,
- We do good works which He prepared in advance,
- And, as we see repeatedly through all the pastoral letters of the New Testament, it's the environment in which all those relationships get tested and strengthened and you have your best chance to mature.

Last time I focused on the importance of intentional spiritual relationships and Small Groups, but I want to finish today by looking at being a part of the whole church, the living temple of Christ, which is both the church global but more practically the church local. Because, if the reset is personal but we are all joined together to be the temple of God, then it's a collective reset too. If we are in this together, then what is happening to you is happening to us, and what is happening to us is happening to you.

So we have to ask, **what is our reset as a church?**

As I've pondered that question I can't help think about that original tent and the temple God didn't ask for, yet accommodates. Let's face it, like David, we like to build stuff and do stuff in His name. So here is my question:

**What have we built that God accommodates but did not ask for?**

OR to express that another way: **what do people in churches today desire, compared to what God desires?**

Let me illustrate this with my local café, which I'm pretty loyal to. I haven't told them this but we have a contract - at least in my mind. It goes like this: When I go, there will be parking. They will take my order quickly. The music will be not too loud and not too soft. The tables and toilets, clean. The temperature sits within about a 3-degree band of acceptability. Of course, the coffee will be exactly as I like it, and arrive as soon as possible. I'd like it if they know my name. And, if all those boxes are ticked most of the time, I'll stay loyal and I'll buy their stuff. But if they start to slip, well, I can always take my addiction down the road. And though we've never talked about it, the owner knows this is the contract for me and everyone else because, if people leave, it will most likely not be because there happens to be 5 other cafes in the area, but because they failed to meet the expectations of their existing patrons...

Now, substitute the word "café" for the word "church" in that story. We desire a pretty similar contract from the church - if we have adequate parking, the building clean, the coffee reasonable, the welcome sincere, the music just the right volume, the temperature not too hot or cold, the sermon just the right length, engaging, simple but deep, and there is enough Holy Spirit freedom to not feel like the frozen-chosen but not too much to get weird, if my kids like the kids program, and it's all over in 90 minutes - oh, and I can avoid any conflict with anyone... then I'll stay.

I know that sounds cynical but please know, I'm not being cynical here - I've just had front row seats for most of my life as a pastor watching this play out a thousand times, watching people divide the church or leave the church over likes and dislikes and relational ruptures, and make all kinds of excuses not to live radically intentional, holistic, communal, sacrificial and missional. We run from the divinely orchestrated opportunities for personal growth and maturity that only being joined to one another, warts and all, will afford us.

I want to put it out there that ministers in churches everywhere feel such pressure to build churches that please people first and the Lord second. Honestly, it is so tempting to buy into the same consumeristic mind sets with which we choose our café and create a church that tries to tick all the boxes and attract as many people as possible - because then you feel like you are successful. But Jesus makes it clear that a crowd is not a success; and I think, partly thanks to COVID, we are all learning to think that way too.

Of course it's impossible to please everyone, and for every person you please another is thinking I might get my 'spiritual latte' down the road next time. But the big question haunting me is: **are we more desperate to please people or to please God?**

**What did Jesus actually desire for his church?** What we see in the early church in Acts 2 and 4 is people from all walks of life gathering in homes and around tables through the week. They devoted themselves to fellowship, the Apostles teaching, to breaking of bread, to prayer. They were radically generous, radically inclusive and radically missional - and that's about it. This is the church Jesus asks for and the Lord added to their number daily those being saved. Everything else is optional. Earliest Christians were actually labelled atheists because their shared life was so devoid of religious activity or their worship so uncomplicated, that most people assumed they had no god at all.

Friends, there is no divine mandate for a grand building, elaborate ceremony, stained glass, long sermons, worship sets, kids ministries, priestly garments, climate control, microphones, espresso machines!!! None of those things are bad - they've all found a valued place in history - the stained glass taught the gospel in pictures to the illiterate for hundreds of years. The preached sermon the only way people could access the Word of God in an age where Bibles were scarce.

In Mark 11:15-17, Jesus causes quite a scene in the temple: *On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.*

But every generation has to pause and ask: **what does it mean to be the church and is church about getting what we want or giving Jesus what he wants?**

Think about it, Jesus is overturning the tables and clearing out the very temple Haggai's generation built. I imagine Jesus' action would have shocked and offended regular people going about their daily worship lives who were so used to this they could not see a problem. But God could. Over a long period of time, the worship life of the temple had been commodified, commercialised, and there was more activity associated with the business of running the temple than there was of using the temple for what it was there for: to commune with God. It's so easy to lose perspective on what is most important, and Jesus' action is a powerful statement to them and us how easy secondary things become too important, and we have to collectively turn over the tables, reset our priorities as a church too. **We have to distinguish between being devoted to the message and commands of Jesus, and being devoted to a method and model of us.**

So, if we were to reset church back to the primary desires of God, put simply:

- We've been invited to come follow Him, as disciples filled with the Spirit, being renewed with Jesus, for Jesus, through Jesus.
- We've been invited to live devoted lives, with Jesus at the centre.
- We've been commanded to love God with all our heart soul mind and strength.
- We've been commanded to love one another – bear one another's burdens, serving and pursuing unity.
- We've been commanded to make disciples of all nations baptising them and teaching them to obey Jesus commands.

The church God desires is a worshipping community, a prayerful community. It was a radically loving community, inclusive; and it was a devoted community transformation. Not a club, or a café, or a department store – it's the body of Jesus, the temple of God's presence, the hope of the world. Do you get it?

The mission and vision of our church is specifically around making and maturing disciples – I want to reset the church to actually fulfil that mission. I think that means much more than a neat sermon series and better definition of discipleship. I think it requires fundamental re-imagining of what it means to be us. Over the past term, I've tried to light the fuse on a reset in your life and our shared life around being the kind of disciples Jesus died to make: Spirit filled, world changers. And I imagine many of you will applaud that sentiment. But agreement is meaningless if it doesn't start in you first. Don't think about how everyone else can reset and think it doesn't matter if you give it a miss. Personal renewal always precedes church renewal. So this week, in our final fortnight of reflection on the reset, please take time each day to reflect and pray via the [Discipleship Resources Page](#), talk about what this all means with key people, your Small Group – to be the church, to put whatever we want as secondary to what Jesus wants and run the race marked out for us all.