

Date: November 9, 2025 (Pentecost 22)

1. Texts: Haggai 1:15b-2:9; Ps. 145:1-5, 18-22; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: trusting God in the absence of proof.
4. Aim: inspire, guide.
5. Proposition: "Take courage. Trust in God."

TAKE COURAGE

We've all read this poem.

One night I dreamed a dream. As I was walking along the beach with my Lord, across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to me and one to my Lord. After the last scene of my life flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that at many times along the path of my life, especially at the very lowest and saddest times, there was only one set of footprints. This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.

"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life, there was only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, when I needed you the most, you would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you never, ever, during your trials and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

It's a poem God could have written to the Jews of Judah after their return to Jerusalem.

In about 587 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon destroyed the southern kingdom of Judah, including Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. He took the leadership into exile in Babylon. Some 50 or 70 years later Babylon itself fell, and Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple.

It all sounded great when the permissions were granted, but the return was not as glorious as people had dreamed it would be. The prophet Haggai stated that the new temple was as nothing and nothing like the grand temple of Solomon. Reconstruction of the city was going very slowly. The kingdom of Judah no longer existed. It was just a Persian province and Cyrus was the king. Poverty ruled everywhere.

This is not what the Jews expected. They expected some material benefits from their relationship with God. They were expecting some tangible proof that they were God's chosen people. The facts that they had returned to Jerusalem and that the temple rebuild had begun were not enough. They wanted some of King David's former glory. But when they came back to Jerusalem, they saw only one set of footprints in the sand.

God said, "Take courage. Trust in me." God could have written the poem for his chosen people.

God could have written the poem for us. When we see only one set of footprints, it was then that he carried us. Through Haggai the Lord says to us, "Take courage. Trust in me."

Courage and trust are closely bound together.

Let's be clear that courage is not the opposite of fear. Fear is an emotional response to threat. The greater the threat, the greater the fear. This is how God designed us, so that we might survive.

Courage is the choice to act despite the fear. Courage is the decision to move ahead even though you are afraid. Courage is the choice to push through the fear, to rise above the fear to action.

Trust is also a choice, the choice to act without proof, to believe in the other despite our circumstances and despite what others might say. We choose to live as if the beloved were everything they appear to be, everything they claim to be. We make decisions based on their existence. That's trust.

It is God who said, "Take courage. Trust in me." We choose to push through our doubts and fears because we trust God to be God, even when we

have no proof. We choose to act because we believe God will be our God. When we look back on our circumstances, we already know what one set of footprints mean. We've already made the choice to trust, and so we've already found the courage to trust in God.

This isn't always easy. Usually, we have no proof that God is paying attention to us. We certainly have no proof that Christians have any more protection than any other faith group. But courage and trust are only proven in the verbs of our daily lives. We act courageously. We trust.

When cancer strikes, we choose to trust that God is with us, even without a physical healing. We choose to trust in the midst of divorce. We find the courage to trust in God as our loved one enters the extended care facility. Courage and trust won't cancel fear, but they will enable us to rise above the fear and so experience the love God intends for us.

And all this without proof. You see, here's the thing: proof works against faith. If we had undeniable proof that Jesus existed, if he stood before us this morning in his resurrected glory, we would have no option but to accept it. Faith would be destroyed. If God actually gave us physical proof that he was working in our circumstances, we wouldn't need to trust in him. We would have proof.

Faith is the choice to believe in God and in his love for us in the absence of physical proof. It is such faith that saves us. Faith opens up the door to experience eternal life in the presence of God.

Haggai's message to us is clear. Have faith in God. Find the courage to trust God even in the darkest shambles of life. Trust in God to carry you over the rough patches. That's how we will know that we have become a chosen people.

AMEN.