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**IN THIS PLACE I SHALL GIVE PEACE**  
**Sermon for the Re-Dedication of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Toowoomba**  
**Haggai 2:6-9**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Haggai 2:6-9: **For this is what the LORD of hosts has said: “In a little while, I shall once again shake the heavens, the earth, the sea and the dry land. <sup>7</sup> I shall also shake all the nations, and they will come to the One whom all the nations desire. Then I shall fill this house with glory,” the LORD of hosts has said. <sup>8</sup> “The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,” declares the LORD of hosts. <sup>9</sup> “This latter house will be more splendid than the former one,” the LORD of hosts has said. “In this place I shall give peace,” declares the LORD of hosts.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We now have a new building to worship in. Having left the church at Troys Road, we have moved here to the former site of St Mary’s Anglican Church. Why? Why have we left our former premises?

As many of you would know, Chapter One Lutherans purchased the land in the early days of the AELC with the idea of establishing a seminary. In April 1994, the site and building were dedicated, and members of Bethlehem, who had been meeting in the Laurel Bank Hall in Toowoomba for a couple years, now made Troys Road their home church. Back then, Charlton wasn’t what it is now!

While that building had served its purpose well over the years, not only as a church for worship services, but also as a place for meetings and youth gatherings and so forth, in recent times, discussions began on whether or not to erect another building for a hall, or to renovate and build onto the church to make it larger so Bethlehem could host parish services, being pretty much central to our one large parish. Some even floated the idea of selling and moving somewhere further in town, as being located where we were, on the western outskirts of Toowoomba, wasn’t the ideal position where we could prayerfully grow our membership and carry out mission work. Then, of course, there was always the ongoing concern made about the safe entrance and exit since the overpass was built right out front of the church. The constructing of that overpass did us no favours. So a few different ideas were discussed among our members and presented to Chapter One Lutherans.

Anyhow, it has been fascinating to me the last few months to listen to all the different dreams that the members of Bethlehem had about their congregation. Then, by the grace of God, Nev Lotz, a member who is now with Jesus, saw the For Sale signs on this church. Realising the opportunity, he informed others, and the wheels were set in motion. Things moved quickly: a successful offer was made to purchase these premises, now we are here – and no doubt, God has had a hand in all this. All praise to Him!

We have great plans and purposes for these facilities as we now move forward. It has been lovely to see the enthusiasm from members who have worked the

past month or so tirelessly fixing things up. There is still some ongoing maintenance work to do, but already much has been done, with lots of items and time being donated. How a church looks and is maintained says a lot about the people who worship there.

However, while this is great, let us stop for a moment and ask, “*What is God’s continuing plan for this building?*” So often, building a new church or buying and moving into a church building is looked at much like the way a child looks when they open a gift at Christmas time. We love it; we think it’s great, but, in time, the novelty wears off, and we forget its purpose, what it has been designed to do. We get into the same old habit of going to church on a Sunday morning before going our separate ways till we meet again in a week. Going to church is nothing special; sadly, for many, it is a bore.

The words of our text this morning sees the LORD God speaking to the people of Israel about their place of worship. Solomon’s temple was exceedingly glorious, but had been destroyed. Unlike us, who have simply moved to a new place of worship, the Israelites were starting to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Many were now wondering if this new house, this temple, would ever be as grand and glorious as the one that had been destroyed, even as the LORD of hosts had declared, “**The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,**” meaning that whatever was needed to build the temple, the LORD would provide. So the LORD came to these people and announced several things.

First, He said that His glory would “**fill this house**” and that the glory of this new house would be “**more splendid than the former one.**” The LORD God was promising that His presence would fill their house. The glory that is referred to here is the glory of the presence of God. He had promised to be present within the walls of their new house where God’s people could come to be with Him, and He would come to be with His people.

The LORD God also revealed the purpose of that new house from His perspective. “**In this place I shall give peace,**” He declared. Peace is what that house was all about. Peace was why God had commanded the Israelites to rebuild their place of worship. Peace is what God wanted to give to His people through that house, and that, dear friends, is God’s continuing primary plan for this house, namely, to keep using it to give peace to His people. That’s why we have houses of the LORD so that God can come to us in all of His glory and give us peace. But what do we mean by peace?

We all crave peace. Peace of conscience. Peace in life. Peace among our people. Peace in our families. Peace in our world. Is it too much to expect? In this world, yes. The Word of God tells us to prepare for wars and rumours of wars<sup>1</sup> and for times getting worse. And yet, there is peace. How does the LORD God give us peace? This is the place where He will come to us, again and again, to tell us of His love for us. This is a place where God comes to us and takes away the burden of our sins. This is a place where God comes to us and assures us that all our sins are forgiven. This is a place where God reminds us that He is with us always, that He is for us, and that one day He will come and take us to Himself in heaven. This is a place where God comes to us and gives us His peace.

How does the LORD God give us peace? By reminding us of His Son, Jesus Christ, and of the sacrifice He has willingly made for us on the cross. Peace comes through the preaching of the Gospel, knowing that Jesus has died for us, that He has paid for our sins in full, and that, through His resurrection, He has made it possible for us to be reconciled with the Father and be a part of His eternal family. The Apostle Paul writes that “*God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself*” (2 Cor. 5:19). Peace flows from the cross of Jesus Christ, and here in this place, our Father will remind us again and again of Jesus Christ and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 24:6

Him crucified<sup>2</sup>. Here He will take away our fears and worries by reminding us of His love as shown at the cross of Jesus Christ. Here our Father will remove from us the burden of guilt by reminding us of the death of Jesus on the cross. Here He will give us peace and hope by pointing us both to the cross and to the empty tomb. Here, people will be brought into God's kingdom through Holy Baptism. Here, faith will be strengthened, and sins forgiven through the receiving of Christ's body and blood, and here will His life-saving Word be heard. **"In this place I shall give peace," declares the LORD of hosts.**

But not just to us either! Our First Reading from before from 1 Kings<sup>3</sup> makes this clear. As Solomon dedicated the first temple in Jerusalem, he talked about the gifts God wanted to give to His people in the Temple, the gift of forgiveness, the gift of answered prayer, and the gift of His presence. Solomon talked about how God would turn their hearts to Him in the Temple. But Solomon also made it clear that God wanted to use the Temple as a base for outreach in the world. He talked about God's goal that all the people of the earth would know that the Lord is God and that there is no other. Solomon made it clear that the Temple was not just about God reaching out to the people of Israel, but also that God would reach out in love through that Temple and through the people of Israel to the lost and unbelieving around them. God wanted to grant peace not just to those who already believed but also to those who *had not yet believed*. The Temple was designed to benefit both believers and unbelievers. Furthermore, what did Jesus say to Zacchaeus in our Gospel Reading? *"The Son of Man has come to search for and to save what has been lost"* (Luke 19:10). It is our Lord's desire that all people come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved.<sup>4</sup>

The Gospel of John makes the exact same point. As the resurrected Jesus announced, *"Peace be with you"* to His disciples, He also immediately announced, *"As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you"* (20:21). Jesus gave His disciples the Power of the Keys, the right to announce to repentant sinners on His behalf the forgiveness of sins. Immediately after Jesus had pronounced peace to His followers, He sent them out to give that same peace to others by announcing the forgiveness of sins.

That, too, is God's plan for this house. God wants to keep using this building and this congregation to grant peace to the lost and the unchurched around us. God wants to use this building as a mission outpost, as a mission base.

It is vital that we remember this. So often, congregations forget God's plan. So often, we make the mistake of thinking that a church is just *its own members*. We don't care about the lost. But God cares. He cares for us and for all others. If we do care for others, then it is vitally important to get our confession right. What we say to others about Jesus is critical.

Jesus once asked His disciples, *"Who do you say I am?"* Simon Peter answered, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Jesus answered him, *"Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah! For flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but My Father, who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I shall build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it"* (Matthew 16:15-18).

Peter recognised and confessed Jesus to be the long-awaited Saviour of the world. Jesus commended Peter for his confession and reminded him that no one could have figured that out by himself. Peter knew because the Father had revealed this truth to him. In the same way, those of us who know Jesus as our Lord and Saviour have not come to that conviction by figuring that out for ourselves or by making a conscious decision to believe in Jesus. We know Jesus as our

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings 8:22-30

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4

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Saviour only because God the Holy Spirit, through the power of the Gospel, has graciously created saving faith in our hearts.

Then Jesus made some incredible statements about His church on earth and about Peter. “*You are Peter, and on this rock I shall build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*” Peter means *rock*, but Jesus is not saying that He will build His church on Peter. He was saying that there was something about Peter and the **confession** he had made that Jesus would use for building His church. In Greek, Jesus said, “*You are Petros, and on this petra I shall build My church.*” *Petros* means a loose rock, a stone, while *petra* means a rocky cliff, a shelf or ledge of rock, the kind of rock on which the wise man built his house<sup>5</sup>. The truth Peter confessed is the solid rock on which Jesus builds His church. All who make this same confession from their hearts are living stones (Peters) that fit together in the construction of Christ’s church. This is precisely the message that God wants us to keep proclaiming in this beautiful church, and to invite others to make that same confession. To those who already believe, He says, “*Stay close to Me, the One you confess!*” And to those who do not yet believe, He says, “*Cling to Me!*” The wise man will build his life on Jesus. The wise man will build his eternal future on Jesus. We confess our faith in Jesus, clinging to Him so that we can be saved.

The LORD had said to the Israelites, “**Then I shall fill this house with glory.**” The glory of this house does not lie in gold or silver or other precious objects, since that first temple had been built much more richly and splendidly. Rather, the glory of this house is a *spiritual glory*, which comes through the pure preaching of the Gospel. This is where we confess and are at peace with God and one another, and know that the harvest fields are ripe, and are convinced that God will keep using us and this house to reach out to those who have no church home or who do not have a strong relationship with Him.

May we always remember God’s purpose for this place. May we come here regularly and allow God to grant us His peace through the forgiveness of sin. And may we do our part to help God extend His kingdom and His peace through this place and through our lives. “**In this place I shall give peace,**” declares the **LORD of hosts**. May it continue to be so, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

## PRAYER

Almighty God and Father, in wisdom You have made the world and all things, seen and unseen. We praise You for the gift of life, for the wonderful creation of our bodies, for our moral and spiritual capacities, and for the marvellous gifts of intelligence and reason. But, above all else, we thank and praise You for the gift of faith, by which we know You and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. We praise and worship Him for showing us Your great love by dying the death that enables sinners to live for ever. We praise You for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who has brought us to faith in Jesus, and has changed our hearts from rebellion against You to love and praise for You.

O almighty, everlasting God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we praise You that you have called us to come today into this, Your house, to be served by You. We thank you that Your church, the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, continues among us with the means of everlasting life. We thank You that You have made it possible through the varied gifts of our members to meet this day in Your presence. Make this church and hall a blessing to the members of this congregation

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 7:25

and this parish. Grant that in them all may continue to learn well and richly the Gospel of salvation in Your Son. Let all who worship here not despise Your mercy but treasure the instruction and admonition that are given here. Teach us Your commandments and let us grow in the knowledge of the salvation that Jesus Christ has won for us all.

We are re-dedicating to You what is already Your own. May Your holy name be kept holy among us here. Grant that as we come together to worship, we remember that this is a place that is consecrated to Your name, so that Your kingdom may be extended. Grant that all who teach Your Word here may serve humbly and faithfully. Grant that here we may grow in knowledge of You and Your Word, and grow closer to our fellow members in the body of Christ. Serve us regularly with Your Word and Sacrament. Give us many opportunities to speak Your word of life. When people here give others a reason for the hope that is in them, add Your blessing to those who hear it.

Keep our priorities right in the use of the hall. When we are engaged in secular activities in the hall, grant that all that is done may serve Your glory.

O Lord, today, on this All Saints Day, we must also thank You for all the saints remembered and forgotten, for those dear souls who are now standing in Your presence. We thank You for calling them in this life to be Your children, and we thank You that we too, have been called by the Gospel to be Your saints. We remember especially today two dear former members of Bethlehem congregation whom You have called to their eternal glory, namely Eric Richards and Neville Lotz. Both men gave much in their earthly lives to see that Your Word was taught in its truth and purity. Both gave so much to the Bethlehem congregation, having a love for You and their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and although it would have been wonderful for both to be joining with us today, nevertheless, we know that what they are now experiencing, namely, standing in Your glory, that they are indeed joining with us in worshipping You. Thank You for the gift of life and faith You gave to Eric and Nev, and remind us that we shall see them both again, along with all those who have gone before us, when You call us into Your heavenly home.

Therefore, let us clearly recognise what it means to be called children of God, and to remember that we are your saints not by our own inclination or strength, but simply by Your gracious call and forgiveness that we have freely received through our Saviour, Christ Jesus.

In mercy, pour out Your Spirit on us anew each day, so that our love, knowledge, and spiritual power may keep on growing, and our lives may be filled with the truly good qualities that only Jesus Christ can produce. Lead us by Your Spirit to love one another with brotherly love, and to forgive one another as You have forgiven us for Christ's sake.

Help us all to grow day by day in the knowledge of You and glorify Your name by a holy life. Grant dear Lord Jesus that we may all see You face to face in Your heavenly glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit and with all the company in heaven give You praise, glory, and honour, for ever, through Your holy name. Amen.

### Dedication/Re-Dedication of a Church

1 Kings 8:22-30

<sup>22</sup> Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel and spread his hands toward heaven. <sup>23</sup> He said: “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth below. You keep Your Covenant and show faithful love to Your servants, who walk before You with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup> You have kept Your promise to Your servant, my father David. You promised it with Your mouth and carried it out with Your hand, as is so today. <sup>25</sup> Now, O LORD, God of Israel, keep Your promise to Your servant, my father David, when You said to him, ‘You will not fail to have a man sitting before Me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons pay close attention to their ways, so that they walk before Me as You have been walking before Me!’ <sup>26</sup> Now therefore, O God of Israel, please let the promise that You have made to Your servant, David, my father, be confirmed! <sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, will God really dwell on the earth? Look! The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this Temple, which I have built! <sup>28</sup> Yet give attention to the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD, my God, and hear the cry and the prayer that Your servant is praying before You today! <sup>29</sup> May Your eyes be open toward this Temple night and day, toward the place about which You have said, ‘My name will be there,’ that You may hear the prayer that Your servant is making toward this place! <sup>30</sup> Hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they pray toward this place! May You Yourself hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and, when You hear, forgive!

Revelation 21:1-5

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw **the holy city**, a new **Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, **prepared like a bride** adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> I heard a loud voice from

the throne, saying: “Look! **The Tabernacle of God is among human beings**. He will dwell with them, **they will be His people**, and **God Himself will be with them** as their God. <sup>4</sup> **He will wipe every tear from their eyes**, and there will be **no more death**. There will **not** be any **more** grief, **crying** or pain, because **the former things** have passed away.”

<sup>5</sup> **The One who was sitting on the throne** said: “Look! I am **making** all things **new**.” He also said: “Write this down! For these Words are trustworthy and genuine.”

Luke 19:1-10

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. <sup>2</sup> A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax-collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup> He was trying to see who Jesus was but could not see Him because of the crowd. For he was a short man. <sup>4</sup> So, he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore-fig tree to see Jesus, because Jesus intended to go through that way. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and told him, “Zacchaeus, come down quickly! For today I must stay at your house.”

<sup>6</sup> He came down quickly and welcomed Him joyfully. <sup>7</sup> However, when they all saw it, they began to grumble: “He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a ‘sinner’.”

<sup>8</sup> Zacchaeus stood up and told the Lord, “Look! I am giving half of my property, Lord, to the poor and, if I have cheated anyone out of anything, I shall pay him back four times as much.”

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man has come to **search for** and to save **what has been lost**.”

