

All Shook Up

by Tom Wilkinson, Vice President
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When we lived in suburban Chicago, the “real” beginning of the Christmas season for me was marked by our church’s annual sing-along presentation of George Frederic Handel’s “Messiah,” complete with orchestra and soloists. We invited anyone from the community who wanted to join in singing the choruses, and the sing-along participants, including our choir, were strategically deployed by voice parts in the sanctuary, with the orchestra and soloists on the chancel. It was always a glorious event and truly ushered in the season for this singer.

For two or three years, the bass soloist was a cantor from one of the Jewish synagogues in Chicago, a big bear of a man. I don’t remember his name, but I will always remember his rich, resonant voice, the obvious joy he found in singing and the infectious spirit he brought to the music. His first solo came early in the program: the rumbling, thunderous recitative “Just saith the Lord,” the text from the prophet Haggai, where God says he will shake heaven and earth, sea and dry land, all nations, and the “desire of all nations shall come.”

I was reminded of that solo once again on the first Sunday of Advent this year when the words of Haggai were read in a service of Advent lessons and carols in our local church:

“My spirit is abiding in your midst, do not fear. For thus says the Lord of hosts. Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. And I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations; and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts, and in this place I shall give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.”

Isn’t that a wonderful image, God shaking things up, with a calming promise of God’s presence at the beginning and a promise at the end that God “shall give peace?”

Did you catch the stewardship nugget in the passage? God says, “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine.” As my colleague and stewardship consultant Doug Himes says, “A steward is someone who manages things that belong to someone else. Everything in our world, all of creation, belongs to God. We don’t own any of it. Stewardship is fundamentally what we do with what we have been given — our possessions, our time, our ideas, our energy, our expertise, our very selves. Stewardship involves how we care for all that we have received, how we use it, and how we share it with others. In all of this, we are responsible and accountable to the owner.”

Occasionally we all need to be shaken out of our established patterns of everyday life. Advent is the season when we prepare for God’s earth-shaking presence in our lives in the birth of Jesus. How will we respond to this audacious God of grace, who has temporarily entrusted us to be the stewards of creation? My Advent prayer is that we will respond faithfully and generously to the God who likes to shake things up, “once in a little while,” even us.

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