In the period running up to the launch of our Mission Action Plan, we are working through the book of Haggai; a really small book in the Old Testament but a really important book because it is packed full of strong spiritual teaching as we reflect on what it means to be a Mission-Shaped Church…

 Just a brief recap about the book of Haggai.

 It’s set in 520BC and the Israelites had been in exile for seventy years, held captive by the Babylonians. Now, after 70 years, they had returned to Jerusalem and the Temple was lying in ruins. But rather than dedicating themselves to rebuilding the Temple, the Jews were putting their energies into building nice houses for themselves and sorting out nice, comfortable lives for themselves.

 And along comes Haggai: an aged priest who spends just 15 weeks with them, exhorting them to sort their priorities out: to put the house of God first, before their own luxuries. And his message is simple: put God first in your life and everything else will fall into place. A bit like when Jesus says, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you…”

 And last week, we saw that Haggai gave the Jews a challenge and asked them to make a response to God.

 And we move on today to Haggai 2:1-9. And Haggai deals with a really important question, especially as we work through the idea of being a Mission-Shaped Church…The question before him is simply this: how will we deal with discouragements in mission?

 It’s something we all face…all of us get discouraged from time to time and when we are discouraged in life, it can be really hard to stay focused on God. And when we launch our Mission Action Plan over the coming years, we will be trying out all sorts of new ideas and initiatives - and the truth is that some of them will work, and some of them won’t. We are going to be a creative church, a church that takes risks - yes, I even hope that we will become a playful church; trying out new things, seeing what works and what won’t. And we will be putting energy into all sorts of areas of mission and ministry. And the truth is that some of these things will be a success and some will fail. And we are going to have to celebrate our successes but sit lightly to the failures. But even in sitting lightly to the failures, there will be times when we face disappointment together; times when we will be disappointed because something that we hoped would work just hasn’t caught on for one reason or another.

 So how will we cope with the disappointments when they come? Well, Haggai is dealing with that issue in these 9 verses. So let’s see what he has to say…

**1. The Cause of Discouragement (Haggai 2:1-3)**

Why were the people of Israel feeling discouraged? Quite simply because they thought their efforts were insignificant.

 As we thought about last week, the dates in Haggai are really important - and this one is really important too, in verse 1. It was the 21st day of the seventh month in 520 BC - the equivalent of 17 October 520 BC in their calendar. So what was so special about that day?

 It was the exact date when, 430 years earlier, King Solomon had dedicated the first temple to God. We’ve all heard about Solomon’s temple: its beauty, its glory, a true masterpiece of architecture that was the envy of the ancient world.

 And the people of Israel would have been thinking about that first temple and looking around them as they stood there with their pots of paint and their hammers and chisels - and they would have felt very discouraged…they would have thought that their efforts were utterly insignificant.

 Perhaps sometimes we might feel like that. We will undertake ministry at church, we will set up new missional initiatives, and it may seem, after a period of time, as if we are not making much of a difference. And we think about the heritage we have inherited at St. Andrew’s, Enfield that has been here for 800 years or so, and we think about its history and the saints who have gone before us, and we compare ourselves and think we can’t possibly match up to what has gone before.

 That’s just as true for the Vicar as it is for any Sunday Club leader or Youth Leader who hears stories of the days when the church was full to the brim with children, or Wardens who look at the plaques on the wall of Church wardens who will be remembered for their unstinting ministries, or people undertaking pastoral visiting in a day and age when it is hard to take the church into people’s homes in a community that is very different from 50 years ago.

 If we compare ourselves with times-past which, quite frankly, are more mythological than real

we can often feel discouraged…

 And that can be true in other areas of our lives too: in our parenting, in our marriages, in our work lives we can often find ourselves comparing ourselves to others and feeling discouraged as a result…

 So what is the remedy to feeling discouraged? Haggai addresses this in verses 4 and 5:

**2.  The Solution to Discouragement (Haggai 2:4-5)**

God says through Haggai: “But now don’t be discouraged, for I am with you. When you came out of Egypt, I promised that I would always be with you. I am still with you, so do not be afraid.”

 When we feel discouraged in our lives or our ministries, we need to be reminded of God’s promise to us - “I am with you”. When we are feeling discouraged in life, we need to remember that God is with us. He has promised to be with us and will never leave us, regardless of how we might feel.

 God is on our side. He is with us.

 And to be convinced about that, God reminds us to look back through history. The history of the people of Israel proves God’s constant love. The history of the church proves God’s constant presence.

 But just as importantly, when we look back through our own lives, we gain a sense of God with us always - even when times have been tough, we can sense the hand of God in our lives.

 Jesus’ final words to his disciples before he ascended to heaven are recorded in Matthew 28 as being this: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age”. That is the ultimate promise of God: his presence with us, through thick and thin, in good times and in bad.

 So if you are feeling discouraged in a particular area of your life, remember God’s promise to be with you and rest in that promise just as the people of Israel were called to rest in that promise as they rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem.

 You are not insignificant. Your hard work and your waiting is not insignificant. The effort you will put into making the Mission Action Plan a reality will not be insignificant.

 God is with you.

 And, as we remember God’s presence with us, what is the result we can expect? Haggai outlines that for us in verses 6-9.

**3. The Results of Remembering (Haggai 2:6-9)**

If we remember God, he will use us beyond our wildest dreams, verses 6-9: “Before long I will shake heaven and earth, land and sea.I will overthrow all the nations, and their treasures will be brought here, and the Temple will be filled with wealth.All the silver and gold of the world is mine.The new Temple will be more splendid than the old one, and there I will give my people prosperity and peace. The Lord Almighty has spoken.”

 If we stay focussed on God and trust in his presence with us, he will shake things up in our lives. He will shake things up in this church.

 God’s promise is that, if we stay focussed on him, the glory of the future temple will outstrip the glory of the old Temple. The future will be more glorious than the past.

 And the future will be more glorious than the past for one simple reason: because the future will be infused with the presence of Christ’s Spirit. Just as Jesus walked into the Temple on that first Palm Sunday, so he will be present in your life and this church into the future. Your life, my life, this church, is the dwelling place of the Spirit of Christ. So how could it not be a glorious future waiting for us?

 And what is so lovely is the final word of his promise: “I will give my people prosperity and peace”. A promise of wholeness and healing and forgiveness, as Jesus said in John 10:10, “Life in all its fullness”.

 So in conclusion then, God knows that we all face discouragements in life and that can be especially obvious to us as we wait on God. God knows that we will face discouragements in the future as we unfold the MAP.

 But God says through Haggai, if you are feeling discouraged, reflect back over the past and remember God’s presence with you. If you are feeling discouraged, reflect on the presence of God with you in the present by his Holy Spirit. If you are feeling discouraged, trust in the fact that God has a beautiful future for you filled with his own prosperity and peace.

 God is with us always by the presence of his Holy Spirit. In our discouragements in life, that is the promise and the reality we need to hold onto.