

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, October 2, 2016

Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4

God Pointed the Perplexed Prophet to Faith.

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Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

What is the world coming to? Each and every day it appears that ungodly behavior in open rebellion against God and his will grows greater. More and more people claim no interest in God and a Savior. They even have a name, the None's, who boast of no religious affiliation.

Sinful violence is on every hand, yet God does not inflict punishment on the evildoers. What is a Christian to think? This was the very question on the prophet Habakkuk's mind not to long before the Babylonian conquest of the southern kingdom. Habakkuk's was the age old question of why God does not inflict punishment on the evil doers.

For those who know the Bible, God permitting the rise of evil as the world's existence draws to a close comes as no surprise. God has revealed this to be the case. In spite of that knowledge, the current situation lures us into two reactions; neither of which is particularly satisfying. The first is to despair and wring our hands in frustration. The second is to approve and offer up our hands in participation.

If our only options were despair or joining in, things would be hopeless. There is another option, a better, more satisfying option. A third and better option is faith in God's divine plan. "Lord, I believe that you have the right plan, help me to overcome my unbelief." Instead of handwringing and if you can't beat 'em, join 'em, there is hope.

The prophet Habakkuk was perplexed over the mystery of unpunished evil. He presented his vexation to the LORD and waited for God's answer. God's answer was a good one, the right one, for all Christians. **God Pointed the Perplexed Prophet to Faith.** The prophet complains to God. God answers with the watchword of the Christian church.

Every day as he walked the streets of Jerusalem, Habakkuk witnessed destruction and violence. Lawlessness led to brutality and loss of life. It led to the loss of property through robbery and gross dishonesty in business practices. Men were buying off rulers, judges and magistrates to win favor and obtain favors. Habakkuk might have been tempted not to read a newspaper or watch TV or read Tweets if those things had existed.

Habakkuk cried out to the LORD, "Why do you make me look at injustice?" God's spokesman was not the only one wondering this. Habakkuk's questions and complaint were as God's prophet the collective inquiry of all believers. The believers in Judah all had to live in the midst of this: "The law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted." [1:4]

The prophet complained to God. He asked, "How long, O Lord, must I call for help but you do not listen?" The prophet and the people were perplexed. They were not trying to tell God how to run the universe. In the imperfection of faith we all have, they sought to know more about God's ways in their daily existence. Underneath the surface of the question lies an honest concern about why God did not more openly defend his name and his honor by delivering his saints from the temptations and sufferings they endured at the hands of unbelievers.

The prophet's question is most relevant. Honestly, isn't that our story? "Lord, we believe but we don't get it, help us overcome our unbelief. Lord, we are sure you know what you are doing but we sure get frustrated when you are not doing what we think you need to be doing." Many

twisted and confusing threads weave to form the quilt of our lives. We live that quilt for now without seeing the threads and knots underneath that tie it all together.

What to do? With Habakkuk we mount the ramparts. "I will look to see what he says to me." The prophet trusted that in spite of his brashness and daring to ask the LORD to explain himself, the LORD would answer. The LORD did not disappoint because the Lord never disappoints.

God answered Habakkuk with the watchword of the Christian church. "See he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-but the righteous will live by his faith." God compares the proud and arrogant man who thinks he has everything figured out and waits for no one, even God, to the believer. The believer hears God's revelation and trusts that the revelation "waits its appointed time." For us, that would be like Judgment Day. The believer waits patiently for the fulfillment even when that fulfillment lingers, seems delayed to human perception.

God pointed the perplexed prophet and us to faith. The watchword of the Christian church is "the righteous will live by faith." Paul quoted Habakkuk in the letter to the Romans. It was this passage that Martin Luther said opened to him the gates of paradise. Luther came to realize that new life, deliverance from death and devil, comes through faith in Christ not by works.

Luther came to realize that the believer lives life in faith that bears the fruits of love in the certain realization and expectation of the forgiveness of sin. The righteous lives by faith means I have new life in Christ's righteousness through faith. It means I live my life with faith in God's promises since God has kept his greatest promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. They are "Yes" in Christ.

Faith is a trust in God's providence and ultimate deliverance. My life of faith combines my perfection in Christ's righteousness with my trust in his delivering us from evil. God's revelation, pulling back the curtain, comes at his time. It is like being at the theatre. The crowd may grow impatient and restless waiting for the curtain to open. Only when the players are ready do they open the curtain.

We may grow impatient and restless waiting for God to save us from violence and injustice. He will reveal his judgment against them when he is ready. He already has revealed his judgment against our sin and guilt by laying our sins on Jesus who on Calvary's cross made satisfaction for them all.

We live by faith because we are righteous through faith. God's answer to Habakkuk opened the gates of heaven for Dr. Martin Luther. Those words became Luther's watchword and are ours. With Luther we know these things about God's clear Word. God's heralds run with the sure prophetic word to make it known. That Word always is true "and it will not prove false." God's sure promises are the things upon which the believer rests complete confidence.

We do not know how often we will have to look at injustice, violence, and conflict as it abounds. We do not know how often we must climb the ramparts, waiting for God to answer our calls for help. In the meantime, "the righteous will live by faith." This is the watchword of the church the LORD God gave the perplexed prophet, and gives us perplexed people of God. Amen. <SDG>