Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (C), October 6, 2019

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

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In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The Word of God which engages us this morning is based on Habakkuk 1-2: “The righteous shall live by his faith.”

## Danger!

It's 1940s London. At 10 o'clock in the evening, a mother lays down her head. Her children are asleep, the house is in order, and she is exhausted. She shuts her weary eyes. But before she can drift off to sleep, the sirens sound. A low rumble is heard in the distance. The Germans are coming.

She springs into action. She has prepared her children for this during the many nights of raiding that have already come and gone. They meet her at the front door and hurry out, holding each other's hands. Explosions erupt two blocks away, and flashes of light guide them to the bomb shelter. They rush inside, secure the door, and wait. Screaming engines, deafening blasts, wailing mothers.

The littlest child asks, "Mommy, are we going to be OK?" Her mother bends down and wraps her arms around her. "Yes, my dear. Yes, of course we will be OK. God wouldn't let us get hurt."

But she wonders.

## The prophet wonders

"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?" The prophet Habakkuk writes these words with uncertainty. He knows that God will spare his people. The Lord *will* save them from the clutches of Babylon. But Habakkuk doesn't know if God will spare *him*, his family, his city, or his generation.

"Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise." Evil stares Habakkuk in the face, day in and day out. Babylon’s army grows stronger by the day. Jerusalem erupts in violence, every man for himself. God's people wonder: "Doesn't the Lord see? Doesn't he care?"

The prophet must wrestle with the fact that God allows evil to afflict his people. God has not yet brought about world peace, though he could. He does not immediately punish the wicked, and so even his own people pervert justice. How long will the Lord allow evil to reign?

## The prophet prays

But Habakkuk does not sit idly by. He does not merely wonder. He *prays* to the Lord: "I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint."

The prophet sees injustice, and he prays for the Lord to make it right. He sees destruction, and he begs for rescue. He sees terror and despair, and he pleads for hope.

## The Lord hears

The Lord hears the prayers of his people, and he answers them. Sometimes it's "Yes." Sometimes it's "No." God tells Habakkuk, "Wait." "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets… For still the vision *awaits* its appointed time; it *hastens* to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay."

Wait. Watch and pray. The Lord will rescue you, but not yet. He will keep his promise, but it might be your children's children's children who receive it, not you. The Lord will give you life, even if he lets you die first.

Waiting is hope. Hope is faith. Faith is life: “the one who by faith is righteous shall live.”

## We pray, wonder, and hope

Every day we pray “Lord, have mercy.” Your grandma falls and breaks her hip: “Lord, have mercy.” Your major or your career is not what you hoped it would be: “Lord, have mercy.” You sin, and you fight, and you cannot fix it: “Lord, have mercy.”

It is not obvious that the Lord hears our prayers. He doesn’t talk back. He doesn’t give us everything we ask for. And even if he does give it to us, it’s usually after much waiting, and it doesn’t look like what we had hoped for. And so we wonder: “Doesn’t God see? Doesn’t he care?”

We must wrestle with the fact that God allows evil to afflict his people. God has not yet brought about world peace, though he could. Grandma is still suffering, and one of these days she’s going to die. Our life is not full of unending joy, even though that *is* what God desires for us. And no matter how hard we try, we cannot silence or remove that unregenerate part of us that really, really wants to sin, and we often let it have its way.

How long will the Lord allow evil to reign in us and in the world around us? If God has fulfilled his promises in Jesus, then why isn’t everything fixed yet? And if God is going to transform the entire world when he sends Jesus back to us, then why on earth hasn’t he done it already?

## The Lord is waiting

“Still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.”

Jesus says, “Surely I am coming soon.” “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20). Seriously, come on! We’re waiting. We’re dying for you to come.

So far, the Lord has not seen fit to return to us. He is waiting. Back in the Old Testament, God waited for hundreds of years before giving his people Israel the Promised Land. He gave the occupants of the land many generations to repent of their sin and come to faith in Christ (though they never did).

It seems that God is doing the same today. Before time ever began, God chose you to be his people. He planned it all out ahead of time. And now he’s waiting until all of his chosen people like you are born. He’s giving the world a chance to repent of their sin and come to faith in Christ, as we now have.

But one day, in the blink of an eye, Jesus will come back down from heaven. He will transform the earth and welcome us into it. There we will live with him forever in unending joy. He has planned it all out. It will surely come.

## Hang on

Dear friends in Christ, for now, we wait. We watch and pray. The Lord will rescue us, but perhaps not today. He will keep his promise to send Jesus back, but it might be your great-great-grandchildren who are alive when it happens. The Lord will give you eternal life, even if he lets you die first.

Waiting is hope. Hope is faith. Faith is life: “the one who by faith is righteous shall live.” Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.