

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 10, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

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

The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received. How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds...I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith—(NIV)

Are you good and patient at waiting? Or are you more like me who sometimes has the attitude of: “*Lord, please give me patience and give it to me now.*” One of the things I least like to do is wait. That is why doctor’s offices are definitely not my cup of tea. I can’t stand just sitting in traffic. Even when I am enjoying myself on the golf course, there are times I get frustrated with having to wait.

And waiting can be even more challenging when it involves trouble, suffering, or difficulties, can’t it? When you are in the emergency room or doctor’s waiting room sitting there with a sharp pain, shortness of breath, or some other aching ailment; when you are sitting in traffic and it is vital for you to be some place on time; when a cold or sickness just sticks around for days and days and days - waiting stinks and at times makes you feel like you are waiting forever!

Yet, dear friends we have a God for whom it is good to wait. He always delivers at the appointed time. So in faith we trust, no matter how long it takes, that God will do things in the best interest of His people. We wait on our God no matter what troubles, suffering, or difficulties come into our lives. We wait on our God knowing He is in control even when our eyes see chaos all around us. As God speaks to us today through His prophet, I pray understand how: **Faith waits.**

All we know about the prophet Habakkuk is from this short little book. The question this prophet brings to God is simply: “*How long?*” “*How long will my eyes have to witness such awful things? Lord, how long must we wait before you do something about all this evil?*” Listen to his actual words: “***How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.***”

Habakkuk most likely was a contemporary of Jeremiah and served in Judah. After king Josiah, Judah had only wicked, godless kings, and the people were not any better. There was fraud, theft, murder, adultery and gross idolatry. Prophets like Uriah were killed or ones like Jeremiah were attempted to be killed. There was injustice. Habakkuk noticed that the courts were corrupt and the godless often took advantage of the godly who played by the rules. Justice was perverted. These were terrible times.

Doesn't it seem like Habakkuk had just turned on CNN or perhaps even our local news? Our society is filled with violence, destruction, and strife. We can see corruption in the workplace, in politics and government. We can find injustices in courtrooms. We may witness the godless taking advantage of us and others who listen to God. We witness wickedness all around. We observe the acceptance of abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia. When we open our eyes in this world we see it is marred by abuse, rape, adultery, and all kinds of immorality.

Like God's prophet we know our God is a just and almighty and holy God. He can't tolerate sin and promises the guilty will not go unpunished. So do we ever ask: "How long?" "Lord, why do we have to see such wickedness?" "When are you going to do something about it?" "Why does so much evil seem to go on?" "Why God don't you keep things in check and put a stop to it?" This little Old Testament book is such a good read because we can place ourselves in the shoes of this prophet as he voices this complaint.

We are also able to hear God's answer. In the verses after this first complaint the Lord gives Habakkuk an answer. God tells Habakkuk He is doing something that the people of Judah would never believe. He is raising up the Babylonians. This heathen nation will become very powerful and ruthless. The Lord will use them to carry out judgment upon Judah. Imagine this: we complain to God about the immorality of our nation and God tells us not to be upset because He will do something about it. Then God tells us His judgment is coming because He is going to raise up a large, powerful, brutal, heathen nation to come in, wipe out and devastate America. Would that make us feel a lot better?

As you can guess, now Habakkuk, along with God's faithful people in Judah, have a second complaint. The prophet wants to know why God would allow this totally heathen and wicked and ruthless nation to swallow up Israel? Why would God permit a nation like Babylon, whose only god is their strength, to rise to such heights? Why would the Lord give power to people like them? What will happen to Babylon then? What will a just God do to them? Habakkuk asks these questions and then says: "***I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.***" Like a watchman on duty, the prophet will wait for the Lord's answer.

Now we read the beginning of God's response. "***Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith.***" First of all, the Lord wants to make it clear that He wants everyone to hear His answer. He says: "***write it down....make it plain.***" He wants it so that a messenger can run with it; so that it may be proclaimed to all.

What is the Lord's response? He responds with some very comforting truths. The Lord keeps His promises - always. His Word never proves false. God's will is always done and also note that it is always done at the time God wants. So God says: "***wait for it...it will certainly come...it will not delay.***" He tells us to live by faith and faith waits. It waits for God to deliver. It trusts that God's will is done. It trusts that God will be our Rock and salvation. God contrasts Babylon who is puffed up, who puts

their trust in themselves and their own power and strength and whose desires are not upright and who too will come under God's judgment, to the righteous who simply live by faith. They put their trust in God. They look to and rely on Him.

And no one, and I mean absolutely no one who has put their trust in God and His Word has even been disappointed in the end! Not Abraham who waited on God 25 long years before having a son through which the Savior would come. Not Job who had to wait on God through terrible suffering and loss. Not Isaiah who had to wait on God 700 more years before the promised suffering servant, who was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, would arrive. Not Israel who waited on God in captivity until He raised up Persia to crush Babylon and a faithful remnant was able to return to their home in Judah. Not any of us, because ***"when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."*** (Galatians 4)

God always delivers on His promises and we have already seen this to be true in His most important promise to us. God delivered us from sin and death through Jesus. Jesus lived for us and died for us. On the cross all our sins were paid. The empty tomb gives us new life. We simply put our trust in Jesus. As Paul uses these words from Habakkuk: ***"Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, 'The righteous will live by faith.'"*** (Galatians 3) And faith waits. It waits because it trusts in God to deliver. In fact, if you turn to the last book of the Bible in Revelation there the apostle John hears the martyred saints before God's throne asking the same question as Habakkuk: ***"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"*** (6) They were basically given the same answer, namely, *"wait."* Wait on the Lord and He will deliver at the appointed time. The day will come. Faith waits for it.

I can't take credit for this analogy because I heard it elsewhere but I think it is a good one. Think of our lives and the events of this world as a big chess board with God as the chess Master. God allows us to make our moves. He allows nations to rise and go this way or that for a certain time. But in the end God is still in control and guiding us often in a different direction than we wanted to go. God says *"Okay, if you are going to put your bishop there then I will place my queen here."* And in the end, whether it is in our own lives or with the kingdoms of this world, God always, always gets the check mate. Our God remains in control. So instead of focusing on the trouble, instead of cowering in fear about which nation is next in line to fall or rise, instead of worrying about the calamities in our individual lives, we simple need to put our faith in God. Faith waits on Him and it is always good to wait on the Lord. Amen.