

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
20th Sunday after Pentecost
6 October 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; Luke 17:1-10

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

The prophets were first called *seers*, because they were given to see heavenly visions.
But you didn't have to be a prophet to see what Habakkuk saw.
He saw pain and suffering.
He cried for help, told the Lord about violence and unchecked evil.
Justice is perverted. The law is paralyzed.
The wicked surround the righteous and win the victory.

And the Lord isn't doing anything about it.
He sits idly by, silent, powerless, not Himself.
The poor are not defended, the needy are trampled upon.
The idolaters get rich and boast in their idolatry.
The murderers have no mercy, and there's none to stop them.

Lord, what's wrong with you.
Why is Your world in such chaos?
Why do you, who are perfect and true and holy,
 allow such evil and falsehood and desecration?
How long, O Lord?
Won't You hear us?
Won't You answer?
Don't You see what I see?
Don't You hate evil and love good?
Aren't You just?
Isn't Your Law true?

That's Habakkuk's complaint.

And it's yours too.

The difference between you and the prophet Habakkuk is that you think you're too pious to ever talk that way to God.

Sure, you think it.
You might even scream it into your pillow.
But you wouldn't be caught dead speaking that way in front of others.
You care too much about what *they* think.

But what *do* they think?
Do others hold you up on a pedestal as the standard of faith?
Do they daydream about believing as strongly as you do?

We're so concerned about looking faithful, that we, in fact, become unfaithful.

That's why children are so precious.
 They say whatever's on their mind.
 They're not concerned what others think, how it sounds, or whether it came off rudely or not.
 Kids say the darndest things.

When life seems unfair to children, they cry—
 whether it's appropriate or not, whether it makes sense or not, that's what they do.

If they don't get their way;
 if someone takes something that's there's;
 If something's not fair—
 they cry.

But they don't cry just for the fun of it,
 they cry in order to be heard.
 In fact, they might even cry *until* they're heard and acknowledged—
 no matter how long that might take!

These little ones are held before our eyes as the image of faith.
 In the next chapter of Luke's Gospel Jesus says,
*"Now they were bringing even infants to Him that He might touch them.
 And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.
 But Jesus called them to Him, saying,
 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them,
 for to such belongs the kingdom of God.
 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child
 shall not enter it.'" (Lk 18:15-17)*

And in our reading today He says,
*"It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck
 and he were cast into the sea
 than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin." (Lk 17:2)*

We cause the little ones to sin when we take them away from Jesus.
 When we tell them not to cry out when things aren't fair;
 when we point them to what they do, how they'll fix it, how life just isn't fair—
 we cause them to sin when we force them to be so outwardly pious
 that they can't yell at God about what's really wrong.

What would happen if Habakkuk didn't cry out?
 What if the prophets were silent?—
 If God didn't hear their prayers, their intercessions, their laments?

But that's precisely why the prophets are there: to cry out to God,
 to hold God to His promises,
 to plead for justice against the enemy, and mercy for those who suffer.

The prophets not only speak the Lord's promises to His people,
but they also speak the people's needs to the Lord.

And they don't hold back.

They don't care what others think of them, whether they seem faithful or not.
They speak, they cry out, and they trust that God will be who God will be.

That's faith.

Faith, even as small as a mustard seed, clings to Jesus.
It clings to His promises—who He's promised to be and what He's promised to do.
Infants and children have that sort of faith—
that pure, unadulterated, clinging-to-Jesus-and-whatever-He-says sort of faith.

But we often don't.

Our faith is an outward faith.

It's the sort of faith we want everyone to see.

Look how great I am—how faithful, diligent, how strong a Christian I am!

*“Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded?
So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say,
‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’” (17:9-10)*

“Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’” (17:5)

There you go.

That's your cry.

That's your faith talking now!

The moment you recognize how weak or little your faith is, is when your faith is strongest.

Because then you're not concerned about how you *seem*, but how you *are*.

And then you're right where God wants you, *as His true children,*

so that with all boldness and confidence

we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.

(Small Catechism, Introduction to the Lord's Prayer)

Now, children expect an answer.

They trust God to be faithful, just as they trust their parents to be there for them.

And Habakkuk the prophet is the same way:

*“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.” (Hab 2:1)*

How does the Lord answer?

Not in wrath, but in mercy.

I hear you, He says. I haven't forgotten. It's coming—soon.

“If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.” (Hab 2:3)

Indeed, that day has come.
 Justice has come from Zion.
 Mercy has poured down from Jerusalem.
 The old evil foe already stands defeated,
 the payment already rendered,
 the Lord has come Himself and set all things right, *even you*.

He turned your unbelief into faith by the blood of His hands.
 You who have sinned against Him seven times a day,
 and seven times cried out with repentance,
 He has heard you.
 He forgives.

He increases your faith.
 He invites you into His kingdom.
 And He does it all at this altar.

“Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!” (Lk 17:1)

Thanks be to God that Christ,
 who was tempted in every way just as we are,
 has overcome temptation and the tempter for us!

Because of that we’re no longer slaves, we’re sons and heirs.
 This world isn’t as it seems.
 Suffering is all around, and yet by the cross we are free!
 The reality isn’t beheld by our eyes, but our ears.
 Faith comes by *hearing*.
 “And the righteous shall live by his faith.” (Hab 2:4)

So the Master says, *“Come at once and recline at table.”* (Lk 17:7)
 The Supper is prepared, all is ready, take and eat, you are forgiven.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit