

Sermon, 10/30/2022, Habbakuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4 (Elizabeth Felicetti)

Year C is coming to a close. Advent begins at the end of November! So, we are wrapping up our series on the Old Testament prophets. Today we hear from Habbakuk, who doesn't show up here in church on Sundays very often. Habbakuk dives right into questions that most of us want to ask: where is God when horrible stuff is happening, and what is God going to do about it, and when? "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen?" This isn't only a question: this is a complaint. If a child spoke to you this way, you would likely say that they were whining.

Do you bring complaints like this to God? God, why do you let some really terrible people flourish? God, why did this wonderful person get a horrible disease? God, how could you take a parent away from this child? How could you take a child before their parent? These almost sound like accusations.

Asking God such questions and crying out to God in lament and complaining or whining or even accusing can be faithful. God wants to be in relationship with us. Relationships need attention and cultivation. Just acknowledging that God exists and maybe putting some sort of bumper sticker on your car does not create a relationship. Relationships require time and work. Showing up. In deep relationships, we usually want to spend time with the other person.

In deep relationships, we express ourselves. Including unhappiness and anger and fear.

Habbakuk was afraid of Babylon: destroying Jerusalem, burning the temple. Conquering the nation of Judah. Habbakuk fears of Babylon were founded. All that happened, and survivors of these horrors were driven into exile. So what does that say about us taking our fears and anguish to God? Does it matter? In Habbakuk case, it didn't change the outcome. And Habbakuk was not only concerned about the threats outside. He was worried about the threats within.

Habbakuk wrote about keeping watch until God answered. God's absence is something even saints like Mother Teresa experienced from time to time, but Habbakuk waited around until he got an answer. Maybe we won't ever get an answer as clear as Habbakuk, but are waiting and watching for God? Are you open to a response? A response other than the one you want?

The brief book of Habbakuk shoes a dialogue between the prophet and the Lord. We heard the part of this dialogue today, although we skip over God response in chapter one. Habbakuk then questioned God again, and in chapter 2, part of which we get in this morning's snippet, God responded again. God answered Habbakuk, but it wasn't the answer Habbakuk sought, and it wasn't an answer that will make us all say "Oh hey thanks God, that explains the problem of evil in the world. Now I get it."

God tells Habbakuk to write his vision on tablets large enough someone running by could read it. That sounds like the banners that we sometimes put up for special events, like Vacation Bible School or Springfest. We make them big so they can be seen from traffic. Can you imagine if, instead of advertising Trunk or Treat, we made banners declaring doom and destruction? If we put a snippet from today's reading on a banner, perhaps "You who are proud: your spirit is not right in you." I imagine we'd get some phone calls from that one, considering the calls and

anonymous handwritten notes we got when we abbreviated Christmas Eve to Xmas Eve on the sign one year.

If we tried to translate God's answer to Habbakuk just in this part that we read today into language we could understand and put on a banner, what would it be? I don't believe that banners proclaiming doom would be a good answer. Those of us who participate in social media get plenty of that anyway.

God spoke to Habbakuk about a vision, one so big runners could read it. What is our vision, here on the corner of Reams and Providence? What do we want to be to our neighborhood? We are striving to be the corner church, relevant to this very specific place. Today is Ingathering Sunday, when we will collect pledges that help us decide how to carry out our ministry in 2023. I was grateful that Tammy spoke so openly about money last week, because it's hard for me to do that without sounding self-serving, since my salary, even though I am part-time since 2021, is the single biggest part of our budget.

But in addition to being the rector here at St. David's, I am also a pledger, turning in my 2023 financial pledge today, to be counted along with yours. I am part of the vision of who we want to be, translating Jesus' challenge to his disciples to go out to all the nations and preach the good news. We want to bring good news to our neighborhood, feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and visiting Christ in prison.

We're also a place of prayer. I hope that a Little Free Library will not only encourage people to expand their minds by reading but also might make more neighbors aware of our beautiful labyrinth. I love it when I see you all praying the labyrinth, or working on it, like quite a few are right now—including two of our newest members—and I get so excited when people come walk the labyrinth who are not affiliated with St. David's in any way. Even if they don't come inside to pray, they somehow connect with the holy by walking the path of the labyrinth, in and out. And more will be able to do that with our new wheelchair accessible entrance.

The book of Habbakuk ends in prayer. I love that we Bible readers can see that prayer is Habbakuk response after he cried out his hardest questions to God and didn't get the answers that he longed for. Babylon conquered the nation of Judah. The holy temple fell. And then, eventually, some exiles returned. The temple was rebuilt. And then Jesus came, and was crucified. And then the temple fell again. And now look at how difficult things are in the world. Difficult, and beautiful, too.

Habbakuk prayed and trembled at the Lord in the third chapter of the book, and prayed and rejoiced. He prayed and trusted. How will you respond to God today?