

WELCOME 30th June 2019 – 3 Pentecost '19 C

Habakkuk 3:1-19

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! Special welcome to our visitors/guests! It's our privilege & joy to serve you in worship.

What now? *THE QUESTION* in situations where you have no control. A flat tire & no mobile reception. When you can't fix an illness. When a parent can't remove the pain of a child. When all the options dry up & the struggle is unavoidable.

What now? What do I do now?

What do you do when the season of uncertainty is inevitable & on-going? When you have no Plan B? When what you've counted on crumbles? When today's lousy & tomorrow looks...worse?

What do you do when you grow tired of the fight, weary in the struggle? That's the question Habakkuk faces & his response is as startling as it is confident... *"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights."*

He praises God in the unfinished work of God's redemption. He clings to the Father in the not-yet-realized salvation God has promised. He rejoices in God's faithfulness from generation to generation even though in this moment, the praises come amid cries for help.

When the future looks rough & the floods of doubt are sweeping you away, when the waters of fear & anxiety are rising & you believe going under is your best bet... Praise God...for his faithfulness in the past. Praise God...for his promise for the future. Praise God...for in this moment the Father is powerful & mighty to save, and is able to transform your question mark into an exclamation point.

We'll explore & experience that today...

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father, we who are drawn together by the good news of your open-armed love for us, pray that we may withstand any pressures that might push us apart. Wrap your arms around us, especially when we are feeling edgy, to trust you more than our fears, and to love each person more than we love our own opinions. Anchor us in the assurance of your saving grace, and help us to give that same grace in all we do.

Through Christ Jesus our Master. Amen!

3 PENTECOST '19 C – MAJOR QUESTIONS FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: WHAT NOW?

FAITH CHAT

1. Share a time when you felt unable to change the circumstances of your life? powerless
2. Is there a fear, worry, or anxiety rising up in your life at this time? worried about right now

Let's pray – Father help us know in this moment...you are holding us...you're not just nearby or close to us...but that you have your arms wrapped around us & your mighty hands beneath us...Banish by your Spirit the fears worries anxious thoughts so that we hear with clarity & receive with boldness your promise to raise us up to the highest place...secure in you...safe in your Son...Let praise come forth in the midst of whatever else is in play in our lives...through Jesus Christ...Amen.

I was sharing with Kate the other day that the only time I remember in 30 years preaching from Habakkuk was on 9/11 (Sept 11th 2001) The night the terrorists hijacked planes filled with passengers & crashed them into the World Trade Center Towers & the Pentagon & had one heading for the White House/Capitol Bldg...We had a prayer service at the congregation we served then...Each pastor (there were 4 of us) picked a different text & I picked Hab 3...what you just heard...

I don't remember a lot of what I said...What I *DO* remember was that while it was necessary for us as a Christian family to gather to pray & hear God's word & offer what encouragement we could to one another...to me it felt odd to do so while the dust was still in the air & the fires still burning & the airways emptied of planes & the dead & missing still uncounted & the real story still unknown...It felt weird because the wounds were still raw & the tears & the fears were still raging...There was so much we didn't know. And every one of us asked: Why this? & What now?

Habakkuk knows...he saw with his own eyes...so he cried out to God. Why...is evil permitted to violate the innocent? Why are violence & injustice permitted to pervert righteousness & justice? Why are the wicked allowed to have such free rein & cause such heartache? You don't need a 9/11 to ask that...I ask something like that most every day. Why this? And given the unavailability & unfixability & uncontrollability & uncertainty of so much of our lives...What now? What do I do right now?

What do you do when the season of uncertainty is inevitable & on-going? When you have no Plan B? When what you've counted on crumbles? When today's lousy & tomorrow looks...worse? What do you do when you grow tired of the fight, weary in the struggle? When God's promises are still promises? When the hoped for release & redemption & re-creation is still hope? When the work of God is still a work in process? ...

Well...let's go back a minute...Share a time when you were unable to change the circumstances of your life? Was it just me or did anyone else come up with at least 2-3 answers to that question? I can think of a fistful of examples when there was something in play in my life & I was absolutely powerless...I could do nothing about it. Cry fight pray stomp both feet...nothing...that train was on the tracks & I had nada. *This prayer was sung by the prophet Habakkuk: I have heard all about you, Lord. I am filled with awe by your amazing works. In this time of our deep need, help us again as you did in years gone by. And in your anger, remember your mercy.* As Habakkuk looks at the current moment God puts in his mind another time just like that...actually several times just like that: slavery in Egypt...the Exodus...40 years in the wilderness where their feet did not swell & their clothes did not wear out (Neh 9:21)...conquering the nations that already had possession of the land God promised them...driving the giants out of the high country of the Negev...Jericho where they took out the city with trumpets & yelling...Joshua obliterating the Amorites & asking God to hold the sun still in the sky so they can finish the killing...

Habakkuk sings this prayer of remembrance...and the song goes something like: "We have never had any hope but you." "We have always triumphed by your strength." "We have lived solely by your grace in every day of our history." "It was always you...we've always been weak & faithless, but you have never forgotten to save us." It's a crazy song...pointing back to God's faithfulness to His beloved people in some of the darkest times in their history. Habakkuk, in his mounting despair, in the face of impending disaster (remember God has said it's going to get worse before it gets better) is remembering the faithfulness of God in dark days past.

But it's not time for Habakkuk to shout "Hallelujah" yet...He has just retold the saving history of God in the lives of God's people & he follows that up with: *I trembled inside when I heard this; my lips quivered with fear. My legs gave way beneath me, & I shook in terror.* This boy is singing one bizarre song...Remember the way this conversation between Habakkuk & God unfurls...Habakkuk complains that God is standing by idly while corruption & violence & unfaithfulness run rampant & God's great answer is "The Babylonians" a ruthless war-mongering horde are coming as my instrument of punishment & judgment just like I said from the beginning. It's going to get worse before it gets better... their cities would be destroyed, many 1000s would be killed, others carried away into captivity into Babylon...70 years!

That's just chapter 1. Chapter 2 is Habakkuk arguing with God about the morality of using a people so deserving of their own obliteration being used by God to punish his wayward faithless people...and God says...I'll take care of them too...you simply need to trust me like you should have been all along...*the righteous live by faith.*

And look what he says next: *I will wait quietly for the coming day when disaster will strike the people who invade us.* He begins to really trust God...It's as if Habakkuk is saying: "Do what You're going to do. I know You are for us. I know You love us. I know You're leading us to what is ultimately good & in the end your justice will triumph & your righteousness & your glory will radiate through us even now." Then he rests in that, despite the fact that the Babylonians are coming & it's going to get worse before it gets better. He rests first in the memory that God has never let his people down...God has always been faithful. Then he becomes quiet/content in the promise that God has destined them for a future salvation...future deliverance... a coming rescue & redemption.

And from there he praises God:

Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, & there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, & the fields lie empty & barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, & the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights.

When the Babylonians are not yet storming the city slaughtering & pillaging & burning & killing...When the Persians have not yet risen up to crush Babylon & Cyrus has not yet been born to send the Israelites back to Jerusalem again... When God's promises are still promises? When the hoped for release & redemption & re-creation is still hope? When the work of God is still a work in process?

He praises God in the unfinished work of God's redemption. He clings to the Father in the not-yet-realized salvation God has promised. He rejoices in God's faithfulness from generation to generation even though in this moment, the praises come amid cries for help.

Ps 147:10-11 – The Lord takes no pleasure in the strength of a horse or in human might. No, the LORD's delight is in those who fear him, those who put their hope in his unfailing love.

One of the cool things we enjoy as a family of God's people is that we get to celebrate & learn from folks like Kate Lieschke...who is away being equipped for the hard work of living the good news of Christ in we don't know what sort of circumstance yet...I have invited her to share her personal experience of praising God in the unfinished work he is doing in her in anticipation of the love he pours out through her in ministry...

We remember and rejoice that God is sovereign over all things. We remember and rejoice that God has not abandoned us to our circumstances, regardless of what those circumstances are. It doesn't matter how dark the night is, we have not been abandoned to wrestle with sin, we have not been abandoned to deal with dark days and we have not been abandoned to walk through hard things on our own.

We praise God in the unfinished work of God's redemption. We cling to the Father in the not-yet-realized salvation God has promised. We rejoice in God's faithfulness from generation to generation even though in this moment, the praises might be coming amid cries for help.

When the future looks rough & the floods of doubt are sweeping you away, when the waters of fear & anxiety are rising & you believe going under is your best bet... Praise God...for his faithfulness in the past. Praise God...for his promise for the future. Praise God...for in this moment the Father is powerful & mighty to save, and is able to transform your question mark into an exclamation point.

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights."

Let's pray with that in mind...**Gracious Father, we praise you for your unfailing love that blankets us past, present and future. We praise you in the midst of yesterday's regrets, today's troubles, and tomorrow's worries. We praise you that nothing can separate us from your love or snatch us from your sure and secure embrace. Let praise arise with faith, so that those around us will hear our voice and see your strength to be drawn into your saving love. Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen.**