

**The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22C), October 6, 2019**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

## **Living by Faith in a “How Long?” World**

Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

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From the prophet Habakkuk, chapter two verse four: “THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITH.”

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“O LORD, HOW LONG (1:2)?”

1.

HOW LONG must I endure this pain and suffering?

HOW LONG will death sting and grief and sorrow overwhelm me?

HOW LONG will violence and destruction stare at me from every corner?

HOW LONG SHALL I CRY FOR HELP, AND YOU WON'T HEAR (1:2)?

Does it ever feel like you keep getting slammed? Like there's no break?

That every time you turn around, you're hit with something else

—again and again and—oh, no—not again!

You're not sure how much more you can take,

and you just want to cry out, “O LORD, HOW LONG?”

Go ahead then. Do it.

CRY FOR HELP (1:2).

CRY OUT to the Lord your God.

CAST ALL YOUR ANXIETIES ON HIM,

BECAUSE HE CARES FOR YOU (1 Pet 5:7)

Put your complaints, your laments, in His ears.

Habakkuk did.

Who's that, you ask?

Habakkuk, prophet of God,

a prophet who lamented to the Lord,

who wondered where God was

and what He was doing  
and HOW LONG it would take before He finally did something,  
living six hundred long years before Christ.

And this is what he said:

O LORD, HOW LONG SHALL I CRY FOR HELP,  
AND YOU WON'T HEAR?  
OR CRY TO YOU "VIOLENCE!"  
AND YOU WON'T SAVE?  
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. (1:2-3)

2.

You didn't know that you were quoting the prophet Habakkuk, did you?  
Every time you cry out "How long?" you're echoing his words.  
The problem wasn't just the violence and sin and evil he saw.  
The problem was God's apparent silence,  
that He didn't hear,  
He didn't save,  
He didn't do anything to stop the violence or bring the wicked to justice.

What about God's law?

Doesn't His law have something to say to such things?

Doesn't the law curb sin and condemn the wicked?

But THE LAW IS PARALYZED, numb, ineffective, helpless,

AND JUSTICE NEVER GOES FORTH.

FOR THE WICKED SURROUND THE RIGHTEOUS;

SO JUSTICE GOES FORTH PERVERTED, bent out of shape, crooked, twisted (1:4).

The law is good, but it can't save.

It made no one righteous.

The wicked twist it.

Besides, the people had stopped listening to the law;

they'd closed their ears to God's word.

So the LORD told Habakkuk that he would send the Babylonians from Chaldea  
to punish the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

They would be fierce, brutal, and swift,  
sweeping down from the north,  
a BITTER AND HASTY NATION (1:6).

But that just seems to make it worse.  
More violence? More iniquity?  
More strife and contention?  
The world spirals out of control.

HOW LONG, O LORD?

And who is Babylon for us?  
What fierce, brutal, and swift enemy presses hard against us?  
What foe brings destruction to our lives and all that we hold dear?  
Is it not our own sin?

It's been *so* LONG, O Lord, and still  
we CRY FOR HELP  
and still we wonder if You hear, if You will save.

3.

Habakkuk refused to be silent.  
He refused to curse God and die.  
He did what believers do:  
he cried for help and then waited.  
He addresses God and expects Him to answer.  
I WILL TAKE MY STAND AT MY WATCHPOST, he said,  
AND STATION MYSELF ON THE TOWER,  
AND LOOK OUT TO SEE WHAT HE—the Lord—WILL SAY TO ME,  
AND WHAT I WILL ANSWER CONCERNING MY COMPLAINT (2:1).

What *will* God say?  
To the violence and destruction and the cries of “HOW LONG”?

AND THE LORD ANSWERED ME:

“WRITE THE VISION; MAKE IT PLAIN ON TABLETS,  
SO THAT A RUNNER MAY READ IT (2:2).

Just like God told Moses to write the law

on stones and make it plain so everyone could read it (Deut 27:8).

What God gives to Habakkuk is just as important.

A message written in large, clear letters,

a message for Habakkuk and for you

and for everyone who cries out to the Lord.

*THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY HIS FAITH (1:3).*

FOR STILL THE VISION AWAITS ITS APPOINTED TIME,

says the Lord;

IT HASTENS TO THE END—IT WON'T LIE.

IF IT SEEMS SLOW, WAIT FOR IT;

IT WILL SURELY COME; IT WON'T DELAY (2:3).

The Lord is faithful.

He hears.

He will keep His promises.

He will deliver.

He will save.

Wait for it.

Even if the present feels out of control,

the future is His.

Hope comes from the Lord.

He brought His people out of Egypt.

He brought them back from Babylon.

He brought Jairus's daughter and the widow's son and Lazarus four-days-dead  
back from the grave.

4.

WHEN THE FULLNESS OF TIME HAD COME, GOD SENT FORTH a Savior,  
someone to deliver us,

HIS SON, BORN OF WOMAN, BORN UNDER THE LAW,

TO REDEEM us (Gal 4:4–5).

He came in the flesh.  
The righteous One surrounded by the wicked.  
They mocked Him.  
They spit on Him.  
They whipped Him.  
Then they crucified Him.  
The law was paralyzed.  
Justice was perverted, bent out of shape, crooked, twisted.

O LORD, HOW LONG?

Three long hours on that cross,  
bleeding, thirsting, dying, forsaken,  
for Habakkuk, for you, for all who cry out.  
And the inscription over His head  
written so that everyone who passed by could read it,  
in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin:  
"JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS" (Jn 19:19).

HOW LONG?

IF IT SEEMS SLOW, WAIT FOR IT.  
Friday . . . Saturday . . . the third day.  
The third day, God raised Him from the dead.  
The CRY FOR HELP was answered on Sunday morning.  
The Son of God walked out of the grave alive.  
The violence of the Romans,  
the strife and contention of the Jews,  
the iniquity of your heart had done their worst.  
But they were no match for Him.

5.

O LORD, HOW LONG?

And the Lord answers:

“Here I am.

PEACE BE WITH YOU.

SEE MY HANDS, MY SIDE (Jn 20:26, 27).

I am the end of all evil and violence and strife and contention and sin.

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE (Jn 11:25).

I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA,

THE FIRST AND THE LAST,

THE BEGINNING AND THE END (Rev 22:13).

See, My body, given for you.

See, My blood, shed for you.

Your sins forgiven.

How long? Forever and ever.”

This is the vision Habakkuk sees.

As for the wicked,

BEHOLD, HIS SOUL IS PUFFED UP; IT ISN'T UPRIGHT WITHIN HIM,

BUT THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITH (2:4).

Such faith cries out to the Lord in times of distress,

and it trusts that the Lord will answer.

Faith cries out and waits.

Wait on the Lord, Habakkuk.

Wait on the Lord, dear Christian.

The time is coming, even if it seems slow.

How and when are in His hands.

Faith is a gift.

And so we pray,

“INCREASE OUR FAITH” (Lk 17:5).

St. Paul heard the message.

He lived by faith.

He said, “THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME  
ARE NOT WORTH COMPARING WITH THE GLORY  
THAT IS TO BE REVEALED IN US” (Rom 8:18).

And the author of Hebrews writes,

“FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR,  
THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN” (Heb 11:1).

So we wait.

We wait with Habakkuk.

We wait with all those who lived by faith.

We wait with brothers and sisters in Christ around the world.

We live by faith in a “HOW LONG” world.

We say with the psalmist:

OUR SOUL WAITS FOR THE LORD,  
HE IS OUR HELP AND OUR SHIELD.  
FOR OUR HEART IS GLAD IN HIM,  
BECAUSE WE TRUST IN HIS HOLY NAME.  
LET YOUR STEADFAST LOVE, O LORD, BE UPON US,  
EVEN AS WE HOPE IN YOU. (Ps 33:20-22).

And with Habakkuk:

THOUGH THE FIG TREE SHOULDN'T BLOSSOM,  
NOR FRUIT BE ON THE VINES,  
THE PRODUCE OF THE OLIVE FAIL  
AND THE FIELDS YIELD NO FOOD,  
THE FLOCK BE CUT OFF FROM THE FOLD  
AND THERE BE NO HERD IN THE STALLS,  
YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD;  
I WILL TAKE JOY IN THE GOD OF MY SALVATION.  
GOD, THE LORD, IS MY STRENGTH;  
HE MAKES MY FEET LIKE THE DEER'S  
HE MAKES ME TREAD ON MY HIGH PLACES. (Hab 3:17-19).

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ  
Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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