

Sermon

October 2, 2022

Scriptures: Habbakuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4, Psalm 37:1-9, 2 Timothy 1:1-14, Luke 17:5-10

“The Lord answered me and said, Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is a vision for the appointed time; it speaks in the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.”

In 6th grade I had to memorize the Catechism in preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation. As much as I hated the exercise, sitting quietly to read the prayer book gave me peace in the midst of whatever 6th grade angst I was experiencing, like being called into the Principal’s office for talking in class. For the day of Confirmation my mother sewed a beautiful white lace-adorned dotted Swiss dress. I saved the church program. The back cover says the effects of the sacrament include an “increase of sanctifying grace,” “equipment necessary for the spiritual combat which is inevitable in every life,” and “the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit, that is to say ...the intuitive knowledge of right and wrong, the ability to see God’s hand in the affairs of life, the ability to see created things in their right relation and use them for God’s Glory, spiritual prudence, the fortitude necessary to lead a Christian life, the instinctive tendency to love and honor God as a Father, and loving reverence and awe.” I found peace in “one God, the Father Almighty” and the promise of resurrection because my own father had died when I was 6 years old. I found hope in assurance of God’s presence in whatever “spiritual combat” I would find myself. To this gawky pre-teen, the words of the Catechism were manna from heaven.

I know as an adult that God is with us. God is with us in our deepest moments of disappointment, anger, frustration, fear and doubt. The stories in today’s scriptures speak to people who are filled with all sorts of what my confirmation bulletin called “spiritual combat.” Habbakuk who rages against God, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you, “Violence!” and you will not save. Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.” The spiritual combat of people addressed by the psalmist who “fret because of the wicked,” “those who carry out evil devices.” Timothy’s spiritual combat as he’s “ashamed...of the testimony about our Lord,” and sick with “cowardice.” After Jesus commands his followers to forgive others, they beg, “Increase our faith!” Spiritual combat. As we live and breathe, the world can be a messy, chaotic and

violent place. There is much to fear, anger us, disappoint us, and make us lament like the prophet today—how long? Why?

Today our hearts may break over many things—Russia’s usurpation of property and genocide in the Ukraine, gun violence as the leading cause of death among American children, the intractable political lies and civic violence that threaten our democracy, the ravages of climate change, the precarious economy we must navigate today to feed and clothe our families, collapsing education and health care systems. We can relate to the prophet’s frustration with abuses of political power, the Hebrew people’s resentment that the unjust prosper, Timothy’s fears, and the disciples’ plaintive cry. Lord, increase our faith!

Now many times the disciples get it wrong. Jesus tells them to “give” the crowd “something to eat,” and they complain they have “no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” Martha complains about Mary’s absence from the kitchen, “Tell her to help me.” Or the disciples quarrel as to “which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest.” They are fully fallible human beings. But here they get it exactly right. “Lord, increase our faith!” Faith is how we overcome fear the task ahead of us is more difficult than we can handle. Faith is the grace God gives us today as he gave the enraged prophet Habbakuk, the reluctant disciple Timothy, the anxious disciples. Faith is the grace that opens our hearts to God’s compassion, healing, truth, and transformation. By faith we receive the grace of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord, the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Grace may seem an unlikely gift to someone like Habbakuk who rages at God. “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you, “violence” and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrong doing and look at trouble?” How long? Why? It’s grace that God doesn’t rebuke him for impertinence, or send him to the principal’s office. God doesn’t walk away and desert him. God not only listens, God commissions him, empowers him to do something! “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.” “The righteous live by faith.” God not only hears the prophet’s tirade, he calls him to do something, to act, and to do it boldly. Write the vision so big that everyone can see it! God entrusts Habakkuk with a mission.

When the disciples cry out, “Increase our faith!” Jesus responds, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and

planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” Can you imagine yourself having such power? It would take a miracle. A miracle of grace. Today after church we will engage in a process of visioning in response to the end of life of buildings on our campus. We have the opportunity to write down a vision of God’s hopes for a yet unseen transformation of our church and our community. The last time we met, we reminded one another how our congregation strives for justice, peace and the dignity of all creation. Through this church God’s grace is offered to those in our community who hunger, lack permanent housing, are in recovery, and to us. All of Incarnation’s ministries began with a mustard seed—an idea breathed into life by one person, welcomed into their hearts by others, grown and harvested by the body of Christ in collaboration with the wider church and the city of Santa Rosa. I’d say that’s moving more than moving a tree, it’s moving a forest.

“Increase our faith!” Jesus doesn’t stop there. Faith is more than trusting God. It’s service in his name. Now Jesus doesn’t endorse slavery. Indeed, his inclusive love that we embrace in our Baptismal promise to “respect the dignity of every human being” confronts the evil of slavery and all forms of injustice. Jesus simply uses the language of his day to share God’s vision for living with faith—noticing the needs of others, sacrificial love, and humility. “We have done only what we ought to have done.” Jesus says, “The one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant,” the servant that Jesus was and is in his life, death and resurrection.

An Anglican priest Martha Tartanic, recently describes her burnout from the Covid pandemic. Serving a large congregation in Ontario, Canada she grieved a rising cacophony of contentious voices —“I feel forgotten,” “we’re meeting too soon!” “we’re not meeting soon enough!” and “how can we live without the Eucharist?” Like Habbakuk and the disciples and we today, she prayed to God, and in her spiritual discipline of running, identified a truth of our faith. God never intends to make one person responsible for everything in the church. You are one of many servants. The Lord’s Prayer is prayed by “us,” not “me.” God embeds us in a community, the body of Christ. God is in the midst of all our chaos and grief, showering us with grace.

As a runner, Tartanic finds grace in the word “ultrarealism.” Ultrarealism is the word that competitive, endurance athletes use to describe the mental act of seeing, accepting, and embracing the reality of any situation. Like when on a group sail on the Petaluma river I capsized my boat in a gust of wind. Because of the curve in the river no one sailing ahead of me saw it, and I forgot my whistle! I drifted to a muddy shore in the ebbing current hanging on to the side where folks on the

muddy shore helped me right it. I begged a skipper of a passing motor boat to tow me back to the pier. I soon realized I no longer had the physical strength to skipper a 14' sailboat. "It is what it is." Ultrarealism assumes we're always growing and changing. It allows for "the possibility that stopping is the right way of embracing a situation." Standing on the pier drenched, cold and embarrassed, I knew that by the grace of God I was saved from a worse fate. I sold it and bought the shiny blue 8' El Toro sailboat I now race.

My brothers and sisters, the good news is that in God, all lives are spiritually and physically connected to one another. As baptized Christians we have chosen to be woven together in this church. Like the folks that helped me in the river and friends who cheer me in a race, God meets us here in the chaos and community of visioning as God has met us elsewhere. Tartanic says, "Jesus was an ultrarealist." He knew what he was facing in Jerusalem. He let go of his life to become our Savior. Hear his message, "The Kingdom of God has drawn near!" Israel and the Roman empire was a mess in his time (and our world still is), the disciples were a motley mess (and so might we be), but we proclaim the risen Christ that God is here in the breaking of bread and the prayers, in the community of love we are ever building. Jesus Christ is among us in whatever gusty winds or cold rivers we face.

Lean in, lean in on Habbakuk's prophesy with faith like a mustard seed and Jesus' call to serve, for "The Lord answered me and said, Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is a vision for the appointed time; it speaks in the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay."