

Habakkuk 2:1-4

Today is a special day in the calendar of the Christian Church. November 1st is actually “All Saints Day”. Ever since the year A. D. 741 the church on earth has remembered the believers (the saints) who have died in the Christian faith with a worship service. That’s why Martin Luther pounded his 95 theses on the church door on October 31st. He wanted people to see them as they came to church on November 1. And so, in our worship today we remember the Reformation of the Church on earth, the work Luther did of clearing away the false teaching and returning us to God’s pure Word. Our present world looks far different than the world in which Luther lived. We have issues he could never even have imagined: healthcare debate, global warfare, stock market recessions, and the list goes on. In the midst of all the anxiety in our world, the divisions among Christians get bigger and bigger. ELCA Lutherans ordain Homosexual pastors. Other Christian groups incorrectly teach that you must finish what Jesus started, in order to get into heaven. Confusion reigns supreme in our world. What does the future hold for our kids and grandkids? Despite all the change in our world, there is no change in the message of true Lutheran Christians. Today Habakkuk gives us the message Martin Luther repeated. This Word of God keeps everyone and everything in perspective: **Live By Faith, O Saints!**

1. Throw away your complaints!

Habakkuk may be one of the Old Testament prophets whom we don’t know too well. It might be helpful to review some things about him and begin to see his connection to our lives. Habakkuk was a prophet in Judah, the Southern Kingdom of God’s Old Testament people. He was also a contemporary of Jeremiah, who wept as Jerusalem was destroyed. Habakkuk, too, was preaching and prophesying before God’s city, Jerusalem, came tumbling down.

The words of Habakkuk are unique among the Old Testament prophets. Like no other prophet, Habakkuk carries on a frank and bold conversation with God. His words and thoughts are the words and thoughts of God’s people. With almost rebellious audacity Habakkuk throws complaint after complaint at God...and God responds!

What was Habakkuk saying? What could possibly be his complaint to God the Almighty? Remember when Habakkuk was living. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was on its last leg. Everywhere Habakkuk looked violence raged. Wicked men went unpunished and justice itself seemed paralyzed. His first complaint to God was this: Where is the law and order? Why do you tolerate wrong, O God? Why do you make me look at all this injustice?

God responded to all this and simply said, **“Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians...to seize dwelling places not their own”** (1:5-6). God sends out a shocking statement. He will raise up the Babylonians to seize the dwelling places of Judah and destroy the wicked.

Now maybe for us this statement isn’t all that shocking. We know what happened when Babylon rolled into Jerusalem. They rolled right over the temple and all the supposed warriors of Judah. But to Habakkuk and his fellow Israelites, Babylon was a backwater town with little significance at this point in history. This prophecy would almost be the same as if I told you today, “Denmark is going to unite Europe by force and conquer America.” First, you might get out a map and find where Denmark is and then you’d laugh. It would be decades before Babylon pulled together an alliance and conquered the world superpower, the Assyrians. Yet, God predicts it. It’s his judgment on the wickedness Habakkuk complained about.

Instead of taking comfort in the justice of God, Habakkuk complains again. Excuse me, Lord? You’re going to do what? He’s shocked. The Holy One, the Rock was going to use a wicked and perverse people to punish his own people, Judah. Sure, God’s people were having some problems, but Babylon? Habakkuk doesn’t know much, but he does know that Babylon is not God’s chosen people; they’re a heathen nation. How can a holy God allow such a people to prosper? Even more perplexing, how can a holy God *use* an unholy people? Judah didn’t smell like roses, by any stretch of the imagination, but at least they were better than Babylon. Why would God allow his beloved children to suffer such sacrilege? Habakkuk stands ready for God’s answer to his complaints.

Habakkuk does not have a monopoly on complaints. The same contradictions, in new outward forms, still appear in your life and mine. Abortions in America have taken over 49 million lives since 1973. They say 137 abortions happen every hour—that’s 3,304 abortions every day. Why God? Why does evil go unpunished? Why are the cries of the helpless left unanswered? Christian families in our city are struggling to make ends meet and then the Lord takes away a job. He allows more struggles to enter the picture. Why God? What’s the point in allowing your children to suffer *again and again*?

Complaining too easily and too often becomes standard speech in our lives. No matter where we are in life, it seems easy and appropriate to complain. Take the father of four, nearing retirement, who lost half his life savings when the stock market plummeted, and still he waits to see the “recovery” from recession. His happy smile turned to a bitter scowl and he complains. He stopped seeing God as his heavenly Father and started seeing him as someone else and he complains.

But why is it so easy to complain? Why do I find myself, constantly, falling into the same thoughts and complaints? Is God the one with the problem, or is it me? Could it be that I think I deserve better? I start thinking that my work, my life, my family, has earned me (or at least *should earn* me) a little more respect in God’s eyes. I don’t deserve this kind of treatment. Don’t you know the big picture here God? I’ve put in my time, now it’s time for God to listen to me and stop treating me like a second class citizen.

Then you start hearing Satan’s lies. When you see the abortion numbers, the suffering, the contradictions, do you believe what Satan says? God’s lost control. God doesn’t care about them and he cares even less about you. God’s asleep at the wheel, he says. Give him a piece of your mind. Just a little complaining never hurt anybody. It’ll feel good to get it off your chest. But the lies and complaining lead to more lies and complaining, and the emptiness and anger don’t go away. We end up standing at our watch waiting like Habakkuk, like a lone-wolf.

2. Live By Faith, O Saints!

The LORD heard the complaints of Habakkuk. His response, though, wasn't what Habakkuk expected. Hab 2:2, **"Then the LORD replied: Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets, so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay."**

The LORD instructs Habakkuk to write it all down. Don't miss a single piece of my revelation. Write it down clearly and make it plain on tablets. How is Habakkuk going to do this? We might assume that he would just write it down in a book and everyone would read it. But there's another possible way he might do this writing. We might picture Habakkuk writing down the revelation and then posting it on the walls of the temple. Almost like a billboard for God's people, the prophet would write in big letters for the people to see and read. Then, whoever sees the revelation will want to run with it. It's going to be a message worth sharing, a message of excitement and joy.

But God's revelation also waits for an appointed time, so Habakkuk, don't lose your patience. "Though it linger, wait for it." God acknowledged that maybe the answer given by revelation may seem to linger. Why can't you make this happen faster, O God? But, patience my children, says your God. The revelation is coming. The NIV says: "it speaks of the end." The Hebrew for this part literally says, "the revelation is panting for the end." Think of an exciting moment in your life. Maybe it was the birth of a child. The moment labor begins, your heart starts beating faster and your breathing intensifies. That's what the revelation is doing. It wants to be fulfilled—it's so excited, it's running out of breath!

What is God's revelation? We've heard that it's coming; we know it wants to come; we are assured that it will not prove false, but what is it already? It is *not* an answer to Habakkuk's specific complaint. God didn't tell Habakkuk why evil was apparently succeeding or how a holy God could use an unholy people. He didn't answer why the law seemed paralyzed or why justice was perverted. God simply said to Habakkuk, **"The righteous will live by his faith."**

It might catch us a little off guard: The righteous? Who are they? What do they have to do with God-Babylon-wickedness-Judah-and complaints? In Scripture, righteous is an absolute term. In God's sight, you are either righteous or you're not. No one is ever "sorta-righteous" or "mostly righteous" in God's sight. To be righteous means that we have been declared righteous by faith. Paul said in Romans 3, "We maintain that a man is justified by faith, apart from observing the law." You and I are justified; you and I are the righteous! This truth was the beating heart of the Reformation and what Martin Luther fought for boldly almost 500 years ago. When Luther came to know, by God's Spirit, this righteousness he said, "Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates!"

We stand before our holy God, not because of our good works or any goodness within us, but only because of what Christ has done for us. By faith the life and death of Christ have new meaning. They aren't merely historical facts. Christ paid for and earned God's righteousness for you and me. Jesus' righteousness and holiness have become ours—we're connected to him through faith. By trusting in Christ, we enter into a new status before God, a righteous status. We've become God's saints by faith and we stand as holy people. As saints, we will live with our holy God forever. It's a status with an eternal perspective.

That righteous status will show up in our lives today. **"The righteous will live by his faith,"** God told Habakkuk. The opposite of a life of complaining is the new life of faith. We live by trusting in God's promises. The promises are what we can hold onto, even when evil succeeds or suffering comes our way. Even when the Babylonians come pounding on the gates of Jerusalem, God called Habakkuk to live by faith. Trust that God knows what he's doing. Even when the Babylonian forces in your life come pounding, **live by faith, O saints!** Trust that God knows what he's doing. Put everything in his hands because "God works all things for the good of those who love him" (Rom 8:28).

Living by faith means we live like the four year old boy, trapped in the midst of a house fire. As the family had rushed out of the burning house, the little boy had slipped from his father's hand to go in and find his teddy bear. Once outside the father realized what had happened. But it was too late to rush back into the house, so the father started calling to the little boy. The boy shouted from the second story window, "Daddy, daddy, help me!" The father yelled from below, "Jump and I'll catch you!" As the smoke swirled around the little boy's head, he shouted back, "But I can't see you daddy!" "That's okay," his dad said, "I can see you perfectly." Brothers and sisters, Live by Faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave his life in our place. We are in desperate need of rescue, often from ourselves. Our powerful God has revealed to us his powerful promises. He promises to forgive us, to be with us and bless us all our days and in all our ways.

Habakkuk saw the grace of God by faith. His book closes with a psalm of sorts. If you have a chance this week, take a look at Habakkuk 3 and see his confession of faith. It's a far cry from the complaints of chapter 1, because the revelation of chapter 2 has changed everything. Our lives are different too. **As we throw away our complaints, we live by faith as his saints.** With Habakkuk we can confess the opening words of his psalm: "Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them know; in wrath remember mercy." AMEN.

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