

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Pentecost 20 October 10, 2010
Habakkuk 1:1-3 and 2:1-4



The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received. How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you, make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. Then the LORD replied: “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that he 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. See, he is puffed up his desires are not upright – but the righteous will live by his faith.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Life isn’t fair! Did you know that? I was pretty little the first time I protested, “That’s not fair!” My dad told me, “Life isn’t fair. Get used to it!” Hundreds of years before the Christ-child was born the Prophet Habakkuk complained to the LORD – the Maker of Heaven and Earth that life wasn’t fair. Do you remember Rosie – Rosie Ruiz? Rosie won the Boston Marathon in April 1980. She crossed the finish line before all other women runners! The problem was – Rosie cheated! People were suspicious from the beginning. Rosie finished in under 3 hours. That’s really motoring! The problem was – when she crossed the finish line – you would expect her to be what? Tired? Worn out? Gasping for breath? She wasn’t even breathing hard! You would expect her to be what? Soaked with sweat? To be sweating bullets? To be covered with sweat? She wasn’t! You would expect her to have remarkable legs – very powerful thighs – to run 26 miles – 3 football fields and then some! Well, truth be told – her thighs were a little bit soft! You would think people would have noticed Rosie along the way – the first woman passing by cheering crowds! Nobody remembered seeing Rosie – not early on – not in the middle of the race – and not the last part either – other than that very last sprint through the tape! You would expect lots of people to have film of Rosie running the race! Nobody? Really? As people looked closer at Rosie – two students from Harvard remembered her. They remembered seeing Rosie burst out of the crowd and onto the street just ½ a mile from the finish line. Not even far enough – to work up a sweat and breathe hard! That’s not fair! Life is full of cheaters! It’s not fair! It’s not right! Why does God allow it? Habakkuk wondered! He wondered and with all due respect he asked his Heavenly Father. Today God’s Word reminds us:

Forgiven, We Live By Faith!

- 1. Life isn’t fair...**
- 2. But wait to the *very end!***

This is where we expect the paragraph about Habakkuk the man – the faithful servant of the LORD. The fact is – God’s Word doesn’t tell us much about Habakkuk at all! If you read the People’s Bible Commentary – Prof. Westendorf says – it’s like when you do spell check – concerning Habakkuk it will come up – *no suggestions*. I have baptized children named Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. My God-father is named Joel. I have baptized Adam, Noah,

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Bartholomew. But I have never baptized a Habakkuk. What does his name mean? Martin Luther thought it came from a Hebrew word that means “to embrace” – that he is a kind of comforter – to put his arms around you and whisper in your ear – your Heavenly Father loves you! Again – what a wonderful name that would be for a pastor – Pastor Hug – Pastor Comforter! Some people think his name comes from a word for a plant – a garden plant. We don’t know. We don’t know who Habakkuk’s parents were – his mom or dad’s name. We don’t know where he was born. Do you know what the **Apocrypha** is? It’s a collection of books written at the same time as God’s Word. There is a book called *Bel and the Dragon* that is part of the **Apocrypha**. As the story goes – one day Habakkuk was taking some food to some workers out in the field in Judea. The LORD called him to take food to Daniel in the Lions’ Den! Habakkuk was a long way from Babylon – so an angel came and picked him up by the hair and carried him to where Daniel was – dropped off the food. And then Habakkuk came back to Judea. A nice story – *but* it isn’t part of the Bible – and really doesn’t tell you much about Habakkuk!

There is a pretty good hint – about when Habakkuk preached law and gospel. It’s the verse that says, “**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!**” There is a little window when this would make perfect sense. 626 years before the Christ-child was born Nabopolassar – Nebuchadnezzar’s dad, declared Babylon to be free from Assyria! The Babylonians won a great battle outside Babylon – and would never ever be under the boot of the Assyrians again. It wasn’t until 612 years before the Christ-child was born – that the Babylonians and the Medes marched into the heart of Assyria – and laid siege to Nineveh itself. 3 months later – Nineveh was burned to the ground – and Babylon reigned supreme. Whoever would have thought?

The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received. The oracle – literally the burden – the message that weighed on the heart and mind of Habakkuk – the heavy responsibility that weighed on his soul. Habakkuk would ask the questions that were on the hearts and minds of the people. Very simply, “Why?” Why was the world in such a painful mess? **How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you, make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?** How long, O LORD? Sound familiar? It is the complaint that comes from the martyrs in Heaven! How is that possible? Have you read Revelation – the Revelation to St. John? You don’t need to be afraid of that book – when you remember it is like a kalidescope – the same powerful truths of law and gospel again and again – from different angles. The struggle between good and evil will only become more and more intense as Judgment Day draws closer and closer. But don’t fear! Don’t be scared! The ultimate victory has already been won by the crucified and risen Christ! In Chapter 6 – the martyrs – the people who were murdered – put to death because of their faith ask the same question Habakkuk asked. *How long, O LORD?* **When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. Revelation 6:9-11 Rest a little longer!** We wait on the Lord’s timing. He has never been early and he has never been late! People’s timing – not so much! Watch Sunday afternoon football – and you see timing just a little off – and it means the difference between catching the football and dropping it – a field goal – or it’s blocked – delay of game penalty. It

all has to do with timing. It's hard to wait! It's hard to wait when you are a shut-in – when you live in a nursing home – and you can't dress yourself or feed yourself – when you can't go where you want – when you want – when you feel like a prisoner in your room. When you can't see TV and can't hear TV and can't read – and sometimes it seems like nobody ever comes to visit you. You wonder why Jesus doesn't take you home to heaven. You have to wait! It's not easy. It's not easy to wait for a baby or to wait for a job or to wait for a boy friend or girl friend. It's not easy. But that's when we need to remember God's Word. **Be still and know that I am God.** Psalm 46:10 It is good for us to wait quietly – trusting that our Heavenly Father knows – *always* knows best. To be still – to wait without complaining isn't easy – but the LORD never asks us to do anything – without giving us the ability we need to do it! Isaiah reminds us – you can't figure out God. He doesn't do things the way people do. He always knows what is best. We need to trust him. **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.** Isaiah 55:8 His paths are beyond tracing out! With God we need to be patient – knowing in the very end – everything will work out just right! Habakkuk wrote, **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**

How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? There is surely no lack of violence. Again – if you read the papers or listen to the news – you must have heard about the physician in Connecticut. He and his wife and their daughters were all tied up. He was badly beaten. When they didn't have money in a safe in their home – they made the mom go to the bank and withdraw \$15,000. Then the robbers did unspeakable things – then set the house on fire – so that the mommy and the daughters died from the suffocating smoke. The doctor somehow crawled out a window and rolled to the neighbors who called 911. **Violence!** Even if the robbers and murders are put to death – that can't bring back the whole family they killed! **Violence!** How horrible! Day after day – police officers die in the line of duty. Day after day – fire fighters die – fighting fires. Day after day – soldiers and sailors and marines die – defending our country against suicidal terrorists! There is violence in Watertown homes – to the point that almost every single day – in our community it becomes so terrible – so dangerous – someone calls 911? In fear – someone calls the police? Our homes need to be places where husbands love their wife like Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. Wives need to respect and encourage their husbands. Children need to honor their father and mother. Jesus needs to be the unseen guest at every meal. Our homes need to be warmed with Jesus' forgiving love! That means no one ever yelling at anyone to "Shut up!" You can't even imagine Jesus losing his temper and saying that. You can't!

Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. Sometimes – when there is terrible destruction and violence – the LORD does intervene – right then – right there! A little 8-year-old girl was snatched from her own yard. The horrible person who snatched her was driving an older reddish-brown Chevy truck with a white stripe on the side. A 29 year old truck driver named Victor saw that truck drive by – while he was standing outside – talking to his cousin. Victor got into his truck and gave chase. Four times Victor forced the getaway truck to stop – finally pinning it down so it couldn't get away! Was Victor scared? He was "beyond fear", he said! But he had to do something! He had to try! A little girl's life was at stake! A little girl he didn't even know! Jesus knows us through and through – and died to rescue us! In the end this will be abundantly and undeniably clear!

Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that he herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Thought it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. See, he is puffed up his desires are not upright – but the righteous will live by his faith. By grace through faith we are forgiven – declared not guilty! A French stock market trader was convicted on Tuesday in one of the biggest rogue trading scandals of all time! How bad could it be? They say Jerome will spend at least the next three years in prison. That can't be good – but three years? That's not that bad – is it? It's the fine that's going to hammer Jerome. The fine is \$6.7 billion – that's with a **B** billion dollars! They say – at what Jerome was earning – and I'm sure he's unemployed now – it would take Jerome 137,000 years to pay off that fine – 137,000! It's hopeless. But not as hopeless as our paying for our sins! I don't even know how many sins I have committed! I just know it's a crushing load that I can't begin to pay for. Only Jesus could – and only Jesus did. That's how much he loves us – to give up his life to forgive us. That's why no matter what today or tomorrow brings – we will be ok forever. The *Forgiven* will live by faith in Heaven. Amen!



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