

“Holy Saturday - Living Betwixt and Between”
Sermon delivered 10-3-10
Immanuel Lutheran Church
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Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4

The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw. ²O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? ³Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. ⁴So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous— therefore judgment comes forth perverted. ^{2:1}I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. ²Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. ³For there is still 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. ⁴Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

Holy Saturday

The time between Jesus being crucified on Good Friday and raised on Easter morning is called Holy Saturday, a time when God appeared to be absent. The psalmist reflects the notion that you are going into trouble, in trouble, coming out of trouble. Life never seems to be on an even keel, even for the best of us. Our first lesson this morning from Habakkuk reflects the situation of going into trouble. Our first line of defense when we are in trouble is to reason how are we going to get out of this predicament or situation (I am told we no longer use the word “problem”). We get a response this morning through the prophet Habakkuk as a Biblical alternative to the crisis of our lives.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah was in trouble because of the invasion of the Babylonians. It was worse than a 9/11 situation. They lost everything...their religion (they couldn't worship God in a strange land), their land (being deported a thousand miles and days from home) over 500 years before the birth of Christ. Habakkuk the prophet is doing something many of us don't do, because it is more of an Older Testament thing. He is questioning God like Job and Jeremiah. The opening line “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen?” It is important for you to know that the questioning Habakkuk is making is rooted in faith, and not in doubt. We do not ask the question, “Why does God allow bad things to happen” if we do not believe God was in charge? We ask these hard questions with the death of a child and the loss of a spouse. Habakkuk is crying out like we cry out, “Why did you allow this to happen to me?”

Some of you may not even raise the question. Some of you may, especially those under 30, with health, youth, vitality, and energy have the attitude, “I am the captain of my soul and the master of my fate.” This will work as long as you have you health, wealth, and community. But when one leg of this three legged stool begins to collapse, the house of cards can feel as if they are crumbling in, making it the Holy Saturday of life.

Some of you may say and think, "I tried God during the Holy Saturday chapters of my life, and it didn't work. I prayed and prayed, and prayed." You may see yourself as believing in God, but with no expectations of God. This is understandable living in an instantaneous culture where most of us get what we want when we want it. So, if no response comes from the Lord, we may ask what is behind door number 2.

Some of you may have grown up with God as being omnipotent or all-powerful, and if this is the case, you may ask, "Is God so impotent in my situation and in the world. How can an all-powerful and all-loving God allow this to happen?" This makes a practical atheist out of the best of us who believe in, but expect nothing from God.

Questioning God

My love for the love Old Testament revolves around people very much like us. Job, Jeremiah, Ruth, Moses, Sarah, David, and how deeply they live with God. They dared to question God as Habakkuk does three times in these three chapters. They give us permission to do the same. We seem to question belief, doctrine, dogma, and each other -but not God.

What do you do when you become convinced in the Holy Saturday of life - that God is not present but absent? What do you do as a person who wants to believe deeply in God, but is wondering if God believes in you? What do you do when God seems silent to your pleas? Some of you may just become indifferent, expecting nothing. Some of you may resign to the notion of, "what will be will be". Some of you may just resign yourself to fate.

Anticipation

Habakkuk gives us another alternative to the Holy Saturdays of life, when God seems silent to our pleas. Habakkuk said, "I will stand at my watchpost... I will watch and see what he will say to me and what he will answer concerning my complaint." Complaint here doesn't mean whining complains, but one who is debating an issue. The Word of the Lord comes to Habakkuk: "*Write the vision, make it plain that a runner may read it (understand it). There is still a vision for the appointed time. Wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud, their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous shall live by their faith.*" (2: 3-4).

Habakkuk presents to us an alternative to the Holy Saturdays of our lives. The alternative is anticipation/expectation over resignation. Our confusion may come when we expect and ask the Lord to restore us to the way things were before the Good Friday of life. Restore us to the way life was before getting sick, losing our job, watching our economy go down the tube. The scriptures are more than about restoration, they are about resurrection, resurrection to new life, not the old life. When Jesus was resurrected, he took on a new form. Resurrection is not about restoration, but the new thing God is going to do in your life, and waiting/watching with anticipation. If we are stuck believing that God's actions must be about restoration, we limit our vision to the familiar, and never see it. But if we open ourselves to resurrection we look with anticipation and question. Is this the new thing?

Righteous?

Our reading this morning concludes with this happening by saying *“the righteous shall live by their faith”* (2:4). I raised the question in the Pastor’s Bible Class last Tuesday morning – “What do you hear when you hear the word *righteous*?” The group overall responded with what many of us may suspect, it means “to be _____ (good)”. But the Older Testament reader of this text would understand *righteous* not in moral terms, but in relational terms (The Destiny of the Righteousness in the Psalms). Being righteous meant that one was dependent, and trusted God and God alone. This is more than how we live and what we believe, it is about who we trust in the Holy Saturdays of our lives.

This is not another formula to get what you want. God will not be domesticated. (Rolfing) This is about a vision God has for you that has not yet materialized. Trusting this new thing that God is doing in your life. Yes, it is difficult to wait and wonder “How long, how long O Lord?”

Wait and Watch

Habakkuk’s response, in the end, was a life of faith in the words, *“Even if the fig tree does not blossom, no fruit on the vines, the production of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food, the flock cut from the fold... I will rejoice in the Lord and exult the God of my salvation.”* God is at work in all aspects of our lives, but is most apparent in the Easter mornings. The question is, can we be faithful in dark Holy Saturdays of our lives by trust God is at work and is doing a new thing in your life? Wait, Watch, and Anticipate is the Word of the Lord. Let’s try to stay out the way with our impatience and desire for restoration.