

"How Long, O Lord?"
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Psalm 33:20: Our soul waits for You, O Lord.

You are our help and shield.

²¹ Our heart is glad in you

because we trust in your holy name.

²² Let your steadfast love and mercy O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

When Jason needed to be with his family, I said I could convert our adult Bible study lesson into this week's message, so this is not part of the lectionary. The internet gives about 10 different ways to pronounce this name, and they all claim to be the only right way, but I am going to say Habakkuk. Thanks to Terri for being able to switch this into the bulletin quickly, so that you on Zoom don't need to go scrambling through your Table of Contents to find Habakkuk. If I told you it was between Nahum and Zephaniah, that might not help you much. The illustration on the bulletin cover is a watchpost such as Habakkuk might be stationed at.

Habakkuk 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^[a] will answer concerning my complaint.

² Then the Lord answered me and said:

Write the vision;

make it plain on tablets,
so that a runner may read it.

³ For 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.

⁴ Look at the proud!

Their spirit is not right in them,
but the righteous live by their faithfulness.

⁵ Moreover, wealth^[b] is treacherous;
the arrogant do not endure.

They open their throats wide as Sheol;
like Death they never have enough.

They gather all nations for themselves
and collect all peoples as their own.

Are you familiar with the play "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett? It premiered in 1953. It's kind of like the original Seinfeld because nothing happens in it. The two main characters are waiting for Godot, we never know who Godot is, there is dialogue but not any action. A couple of times during the play they are promised that Godot is coming

tomorrow, but Godot never shows up. When the play opened, many theatergoers walked out after the first act. Taxicabs would line up in the theater district in Paris midway through the show, because they knew people would be wanting to go home. One interpretation of the play by critics has been that this is what people of faith do with God. They wait and wait for God to act but He never shows up. Samuel Beckett says that's not his intended interpretation, but like a good artist, he doesn't tell us what his interpretation is.

Maybe you've felt like that too. Waiting for God to act in your life, in your family's life, in the world, and it seems like God never acts. You pray and if you get the answer you want, you attribute it to God, and if you don't get the answer you want you attribute it to God saying no. To people outside the faith, that begs the question of whether God, if He exists, really answers prayer at all. Are we just deceiving ourselves by pretending there is a God, and everything in this echo chamber around us reinforces that deception.

Our Sunday School lesson this week is about the prophet Habakkuk, who lived during a difficult time in the land of Judah at the beginning of a couple of decades when they were beset by sieges and attacks from the Babylonians, and the other great powers Assyria and Egypt used Judah as a thoroughfare. There are only three chapters.

In the first chapter, Habakkuk says: ²How long, Lord, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not save?
³Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?

One of the things about a congregation of ours that's in our advanced age, is that collectively we've probably tried to put our faith in everything else there is to try in our younger years. In the rest of Chapter 2, Habakkuk lists some of these. Maybe one of the most common enticements these days is the siren song to put our faith in ourselves. It's the American way to be self-reliant. Frank Sinatra sings "I did it my way" but Proverbs says "Lean not unto thine own understanding." We don't want an unhealthy self-image, but we know deep down in our hearts that we are not worth worshipping. We all wear masks and hide the skeletons in our closets. We all have some level of the "Impostor Syndrome" where we are afraid that people will find out that our outer self is just a fraud. Habakkuk says: "Look at the proud. His desires are not upright. But the righteous person will live by his faithfulness."

Verse 5 – Have you put your faith in materialism? Accumulating things? He or she who dies with the most things wins? Chuck Palahniuk in the novel "Fight Club" claims "The things you own end up owning you." Habakkuk says "Alas for you who heap up what is not your own? You can't take it with you."

Verses 9-11 –Have you put your faith in security? .” The extreme might be those survivalists who have built their bunkers and stockpiled their food, but how about us? Do we trust in our IRA’s and 401k plans and our Ring doorbell cameras?

Habakkuk says: “Alas for you who get evil gain for your house and set your nest on high to be safe from the reach of harm

Verses 12-14 –Put your faith in power and violence. Habakkuk says “Alas for you who build a town by bloodshed”.

Verses 15-17 – Sex, drugs, rock and roll: Tune in, tune out, drop out, drop in. Habakkuk says: Alas for you who make your neighbors drink, pouring out your wrath until they are drunk – you will be filled with shame instead of glory, and gets even more graphic in the next part of the verse.

Verses 18-20. – Do you put your faith in art? In poetry? In music? In being creative? Maybe you read David Brooks’ article in the New York Times on Thursday, about how going to museums and concerts and reading great literature might help civilize our national discourse. That may be true, but they are not things in which can put our faith. Habakkuk says: What use is an idol once its maker has shaped it. The one who makes it trusts in his own creation, there is no breath in it.

What about Science – How about Mathematics, the queen of the sciences? Bertrand Russell was a philosopher and mathematician, Nobel prize winner, and well-known atheist at the beginning of the 20th century. He set out to try to remove mathematics of all contradictions. One of his better known works is called the Principia Mathematica in which he attempts to prove from logic that $1+1=2$, which he finally sort of does on page 377, but even then he only says this is how you would prove it once you define what addition means. In the process he came up with paradoxes in mathematics that stumped the greatest logicians of the time. Russell said:

I wanted certainty in the kind of way in which people want religious faith. I thought that certainty is more likely to be found in mathematics than elsewhere. But as the work proceeded, I was continually reminded of the fable about the elephant and the tortoise. Having constructed an elephant upon which the mathematical world could rest, I found the elephant tottering, and proceeded to construct a tortoise to keep the elephant from falling. But the tortoise was no more secure than the elephant, and after some twenty years of very arduous toil, I came to the conclusion that there was nothing more that I could do in the way of making mathematical knowledge indubitable.

The logician Kurt Godel proved in 1930 that these paradoxes would always be inherent in mathematics.

I told my students as a science teacher that science is not an unchanging body of knowledge. All we’re doing is giving you our best guess, based on what we know. True scientists know that some observation or some experiment done tomorrow can shake the foundations of what we think we know is true today.

In Robert Jastrow's book *God and the Astronomers*, he says: "For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance, he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

Do you put your faith in your career? Many who have climbed the corporate ladder say they got to the top and found there was nothing satisfying there. Thomas Merton said: People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.

Mysticism or New Age Spiritualism – The more I looked into it, I found that ultimately mysticism with all its crystals and auras and meditations and astrology was also kind of a worship of "self", about self-development, about the "self" seeking to understand by means of that which cannot be understood, or about finding the the God-powers within you.

Even Altruism, or doing good works -- But deep in our hearts, many of us know that we participate in doing good works is because it makes us feel good, and maybe at its root is really selfishness.

It wouldn't surprise me if our congregation collectively has been through all of these, and still that does not satisfy us. Where shall we turn? C.S. Lewis and all his friends the Inklings were all atheists at first, but the reason Lewis came to believe in God was that he knew he had longings that nothing in this world could fill, so he concluded that he was made for another world. French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal says "Inside every man is a God-shaped vacuum". A hole in our souls that only God can fill. We wait for God because nothing else can satisfy us.

It's not that Christianity is a haven of last resort. We have plenty of evidence to believe in Jesus. We might have wished that He appeared to more people after the resurrection or stayed around a little longer. Jesus really died on the cross, he didn't just faint to recover three days later. The spear in his side that poured out blood and water is evidence of a literal broken heart. If the disciples and the women went to the wrong tomb, all that the Romans and Sanhedrin would have to do is to present Jesus' body, and Christianity would have ended before it began. If the disciples hid the body, consider that almost all of them died a martyr's death, often a painful one. Would they have gone through that for something they knew was a lie? But that is for another day.

For us we wait with Habakkuk. Do you know what helped change Habakkuk's mindset? Habakkuk in chapter 3 recounted the deeds of the Lord with respect to the history of Israel and remembered how God is worthy of His trust. I'm going to invite us here and at home to take a minute of silence, close your eyes, and meditate on the times and ways God has been active in your life. I'll time us and start speaking again when the minute is up. We have a God who does not always deliver us from the

fiery furnaces of life, but stands with us in the flames. We have a God who does not always deliver us from the floods, but when we pass through the waters, God is with us. We have a God who does not always dispel the darkness, but is our candle to light the way. We have a God whose ways are higher than our ways, who weaves His plans through space and time and is worthy of our trust. The righteous will live by their faithfulness.

Habakkuk ends with this declaration:

Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.
¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.

(The Weaver) – by Grant Colfax Tullar – (grant, Colfax, Bolton CT) If this expresses the condition of your soul today, I invite you to stand as you are able and read this as our affirmation of faith.

The Weaver by *Grant Colfax Tullar (1869-1950)*

My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colours
He weaveth steadily.

Of't times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper,
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.

If you have recommitted yourself to trust in God today, tell someone about it. It will cement the commitment in your heart, bring joy to the person you're sharing with, and it's good practice for when the Lord calls you to witness your faith to unbelievers. If what we've done here today is all foreign to you because you have never trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior, talk to me or one of the elders and we'll help you begin your spiritual journey with Jesus. May the love of God, the grace of Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Go and tell the story.