

Sunday 6th October 2019

Trinity 16

Proper 22

Green



Collect

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers of your people who call upon you; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Habakkuk 1:1-4 English Standard Version (ESV)

Habakkuk's Complaint

1¹ The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw. ²O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? ³Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. ⁴So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

2¹ I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

The Righteous Shall Live by His Faith

²And the LORD answered me: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. ³For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. ⁴“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.”^[a]

Footnotes: a. or *faithfulness*.

COMMENT: Very little is known about most of the twelve minor prophets, especially Habakkuk. Even the identity of the enemy threatening the violent destruction of Israel is uncertain. Probably the background of the book was certain events related to the Babylonian invasion of 609-598 BC. Unlike most of his predecessors, Habakkuk addressed his words not to his fellow citizens of Judah, the southern Israelite kingdom, but to the LORD. Somewhat like Job, he demanded to know when the LORD would fulfill his purpose to bring in a reign of justice, righteousness and peace on the earth. When would the kingdom of the LORD come? In total, the book stands as a conversation between the prophet and

the LORD with a concluding psalm confirming what the prophet had come to believe as a result of this exchange. This reading consists of two oracles. The first is Habakkuk's initial lament as he witnessed only destruction and violence. This resulted in a breakdown of law and order in which evil and injustice triumph over established social values. Habakkuk's complaint was that the LORD appeared to ignore all the misery and wrongdoing. The LORD answered the prophet in 2:1-3. As he stood in a watch-tower, he had an epiphany. The remainder of the chapter (2:4-20) elaborated the prophet's vision of the woes to come. Typically the message warned that the pending disaster was the result of national apostasy. But he proclaimed his hope just as clearly in 2:4 "The righteous man will live by his faithfulness." Centuries later, of course, this became the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans. In what sort of behaviour is faithfulness attained? To begin with, the prophet is instructed to be patient (verse 3) for the LORD's purpose is accomplished according to the LORD's own timing and not by our need. That is a potent message for this very day.

Luke 17:5-10 English Standard Version (ESV)

Increase Our Faith

17 ⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶ And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

Unworthy Servants

⁷ "Will any one of you who has a servant^[a] ploughing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? ⁸ Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly,^[b] and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? ⁹ Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants,^[c] we have only done what was our duty.'"

Footnotes: a. Greek *bondservant*; also verse 9. b. Greek *gird yourself*. c. Greek *bondservants*.

COMMENT: Faith like a mustard seed and commending servants for doing their job do not seem to fit well together in these two brief sayings of Jesus. However it appears that in this passage today from Luke's Gospel, he is giving examples of how Jesus taught his disciples. If there is a theological lesson in this brief excerpt, it is that faith and works are contrasted as clearly as in Paul's letters, and notably essential to the life of discipleship. The example of faith achieving unimaginable ends (verses 5-6) showed how Jesus used hyperbole (an exaggeration) for memorable effect. Those who take the saying literally will find no comfort in their failure to make any tree move except with appropriate manual or mechanical equipment. A Christian American, Robert LeTourneau, developed heavy earth-moving equipment to build roads and airports during and after World War II. He adopted as his company motto: "We have what it takes to move mountains." This particular tree called the mulberry was the

sycamine, but in the Septuagint the Greek word also meant the sycamore. The two were not identical. If this tree was the latter, it had very deep roots and would have been impossible with the simple technology then available to transplant the tree anywhere, least of all into the sea. The example of the slaves who should not be invited to be seated at the master's table (verses 7-10) warned against the possibility of achieving the spiritual aims through human effort. Spirituality does not operate with a bookkeeping mentality. Merit has to be abandoned in our approach to God. Perhaps the best commentary on this teaching is the prayer of St Ignatius Loyola SJ (1491-1556); Teach us, good Lord, to serve thee as thou deservest; To give, and not to count the cost, to fight, and not to heed the wounds, to toil, and not to seek for rest, to labour, and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do thy will. The two brief sayings do point to the same conclusion: have faith above all. An increase of faith does not come from our Saviour's fiat or from our many good works. In some situations we may indeed be helpless to change the circumstances in which faith is the only possible attitude to take.

Psalm 137 *Super flumina* Grail Psalter

℟️ O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!

¹ By the rivers of Babylon
there we sat and wept,
remembering Zion;

² on the poplars that grew there
we hung up our harps. ℟️

³ For it was there that they asked us,
our captors, for songs,
our oppressors, for joy.
“Sing to us,” they said,
“one of Zion's songs.” ℟️

⁴ O how could we sing
the song of the Lord
on alien soil?

⁵ If I forget you, Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither! ℟️

⁶ O let my tongue
cleave to my mouth
if I remember you not,
if I prize not Jerusalem
above all my joys! ℟️

⁷ Remember, O Lord,
against the sons of Edom
the day of Jerusalem;
when they said: “Tear it down!
Tear it down to its foundations!” ℟️

⁸ O Babylon, destroyer,
he is happy who repays you
the ills you brought on us.

⁹ He shall seize and shall dash
your children on the rock!

✠ O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: If one wishes to know how the Israelite felt about their misfortune following the sack of Jerusalem in 586 BC, this psalm presents the best evidence. A serious question underlies this lament. Relentlessly, the psalm asks: “Why has God let this happen to us, His chosen people?” The poem appears to have originated in Jerusalem during the time of the exile when the greater part of Israel’s leadership had been forcibly transported to Babylon a thousand miles away. The poet’s memories of life in exile were still fresh so perhaps he had escaped and made his way home, or had been sent on an imperial errand. The despair of the exiles and jeering of their captors urging them to sing some of the songs of Zion ring through verses 1-3. The plaintive lament of verses 4-6 gives voice to the horror of such blasphemy. The two segments give the sense of an antiphonal versicle and response, a crescendo of antipathy rising as the utterance proceeds. Verse 7 includes a curse against Edom. That desert kingdom stretched across the southern reaches of the Negeb as far as the Gulf of Elath and eastward into what is now Jordan. The Israelites had passed through Edom during the Exodus on their way from Egypt to Canaan. The Edomites had frequently taken advantage of Israel’s weakness during the periods of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. It would appear that they had done so at the time of the exile. Throughout Israel’s faith-history, they were treated as intractably hostile. In later times, the Maccabeans conquered Edom and forced the whole population to accept Jewish religious traditions. Then in an ironic act of power politics, they named Antipater, great-grandfather of Herod the Great, as governor of Edom. A vengeful curse ends the psalm. Its vehemence comes through vividly in the closing words of verse 9. This vengefulness expresses the anger of the Jewish nation of their treatment by the Edomites, hence forcing submission on them in later times by the Maccabeans.

Post Communion

Almighty God, you have taught us through your Son that love is the fulfilling of the law: grant that we may love you with our whole heart and our neighbours as ourselves; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

The Blessing

Christ the Son of God perfect in you the image of his glory and gladden your hearts with the good news of his kingdom; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**