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## “Write the Vision”

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27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time / World Communion Sunday (Year C)

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Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

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You heard it. The prophet Habakkuk has had enough. Judean society is in chaos. The weary prophet spends every moment crying to God for help and nothing changes. Still there is violence. Still there is chaos. Still there is discord. He cries out in complaint because wrongdoing and trouble have become the norm. Habakkuk is sick of it and angry with God for not answering him and for leaving him to stand in the chaos on his own.

Sound familiar?

Violence. Chaos. Discord. Destruction. Good old Habakkuk might as well be talking about *today's* world and our nation. My mind turns to war-torn Aleppo, and I remember the face of Omran Daqneesh, the boy sitting in a too-large chair, covered in dust and blood, his eyes staring straight into my soul. Photos like these break our hearts as they remind us of the horrors of war and the searing effect it has on innocents. And Syria is not the only place of such unrest. The situation in the Congo has become so violent that Americans have been ordered to leave. The President of the Philippines casually remarks that he would be happy to slaughter 3 million drug users in his country, referencing Hitler's mass execution of millions of Jews.

The violence and destruction in our own nation is different, yet it is present from coast to coast. Our sister city, Charlotte, was in chaos following the police shooting

of Keith Lamont Scott when riots escalated and those who were angry could no longer contain their anger. People in a suburb of east San Diego are reeling this weekend following another police shooting of an unarmed black man, Alfred Olango. In Townville, SC, a fourteen-year-old boy shot two students (one of the students, a six-year-old boy, died yesterday of his wounds) and a teacher at school after killing his father at home. The acts of this gun-bearing child hit particularly close to home for me as the school where the shooting took place is adjacent to the church my mother pastored for 23 years and where my dad played the organ for almost 30 years. My parents are there this morning for the church's annual homecoming, a celebration no doubt muted by the still fresh wounds of the rural farm community shaken to its core by the actions of this boy. Our world knows violence and destruction all too well.

If we pay attention to the news media at all, we know that other kinds of chaos exist around us—in our political systems, in the hatred voiced by religious factions as people die from drug overdoses, as children are caught up in human trafficking and the sex trade, as racism continues to rear its ugly head, and in the very real fact that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and the needs of the least of these among us are not being met or even considered.

This is the chaos Habakkuk cries out about in this passage, and it is the same chaos that God responds to and the same chaos Jesus comes to resolve and the same chaos which makes us ask, “What is going on in our world? What does the church have to say about this? What does the Bible have to say about this? What does God have to say about this?”

Habakkuk also wanted desperately to know what God had to say about the chaos of his own age, which he knew to be a result of the people's abandonment of God and their discarding of God's justice. The late Elizabeth Achtemeier describes the situation this way:

On every side, Habakkuk hears and sees, “Violence!” (vv. 2, 3)—the violent breach of God's just order. There are moral evils of all kinds which bring the misery of disrupted human relationships (v. 3). There are the oppression of the weak by the strong, endless litigations (v. 3) and quarrels

and deceitful dealings between persons (v. 3). God’s intended order of the communities of Judah is totally missing (v. 4, literally; paralyzed).<sup>1</sup>

Habakkuk. . . has grown weary with the world’s ways of wickedness. When he looks about him, he sees those on every hand who do not care a whit about God’s will—those who take the word of God and twist it for their own purposes; those . . . who justify their ways; those . . . who violate and cheat and deceive and yet who are honored in society’s eyes. . . . the prophet is weary. . . What is the world coming to? . . . Where will it end? Is God doing nothing about setting up [God’s] righteous rule on earth? These are our questions, too. . . . not questions that arise out of doubt but out of a lively faith in God. . . .<sup>2</sup>

The prophet Habakkuk climbs a tower to get his answers. Metaphorical or physical, we don’t know, but he climbs up to his watch post, ascends to a high place to survey the landscape, and there he waits faithfully for God’s word. And faithfully it comes to him.

God tells Habakkuk to write the vision—and to write it large—on tablets, so that even a runner sprinting past can read it, like a billboard on I-40. There *is* still a vision, says God, “a vision for the appointed time and it . . . does not lie” (v. 3a).

“If it seems slow,” God says, “wait for it. It will surely come. It will not delay” (v 3b).

Interesting, isn’t it, that God doesn’t *give* Habakkuk the vision. God doesn’t tell Habakkuk what to write in extra-large letters. It seems that God assumes Habakkuk already knows. God promises that the vision will be fulfilled, but asks for patience in waiting for its fulfillment. Three things God tells Habakkuk—“You know the vision—let others know the vision—wait patiently for the fulfillment of the vision.”

And then God points to the proud—“See them—their spirit is not right in them.”

“But the righteous live by their faith.”

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum-Malichi*, Interpretation series (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Achtemeier, 36.

The righteous live by their faith.

God draws a stark contrast between the proud and the righteous who live by their faith. For the righteous, writes Achtemeier,

. . . there is no reliance on one's own self or personal resources to secure and sustain one's life. . . . Wherever human beings rely on something of this earth—whether it be intellectual achievement or wealth or military might or aesthetic ability and appreciation or pride of birth and status or even the ability to . . . master the complexities of modern life—wherever confidence is placed in human prowess and not in God for the achievement of a satisfying and secure manner of living, there true life cannot be had. . . . True life—life as it was intended - can only be had by relying on God daily to give it. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Righteousness is not a moral term; it is a relational term.<sup>4</sup> It has everything to do with dependence upon God, our trust in God, and our desire to be in love with the God who is in love with us. When God's people are righteous, they "cling to God."<sup>5</sup> Faithfulness for the people of Judah and for us today means "trust, dependence, clinging to God; it means living and moving and having one's being in [God] alone; it means relying on [God] for the breath one draws, for the direction one takes, for the decisions one makes, for the goals one sets, and for the outcome of one's living. Faithfulness means placing one's whole life in God's hands and trusting [God] to fulfill it."<sup>6</sup>

Faithfulness is what the people of Judah were called to in the words of God's covenant with them. "I will be your God and you will be my people." We will be *faithful* to one another.

Sadly, chaos reigns when we do *not* keep our part of the covenant of faithfulness, when we proudly rely on our own strength, when we follow our own path, when

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<sup>3</sup> Achtemeier, 45.

<sup>4</sup> Rolf Jacobson, "Commentary on Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4," [www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=753](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=753), referencing Jerome Creach's argument in *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms*. (9-30-16).

<sup>5</sup> Achtemeier, 46.

<sup>6</sup> Achtemeier, 46.

we seek our own elevation, when we seek our own good at the cost of the good of those around us. When we become so proud that we no longer need God or recognize God's covenantal love for us, our world falls desperately into chaos. When we become so proud that we no longer need one another, we lose the very depths of our souls.

What in the world is wrong with our world?

Nothing that a renewed covenant with God won't fix. Nothing that faithfulness and trust in God and God's vision won't fix.

Do you know the vision? Could you write it plainly in large letters so that even a runner could see it as she ran past? Could you live it plainly in large living so that the world could see it as they saw you living in love, and peace, and reconciliation with God and neighbor?

In a world full of chaos, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the extent of pride and hatred and violence in the world. It is easy to wonder where God is in the midst of it all. But friends, we are God's people, and this World Communion Sunday, we pause to remember that we are not alone on this journey toward peace. People all over the world who love God and believe in God's vision of peace are gathered together around Christ's table this day. Here we become the community of faith, called and gathered, fed and sent out to bear God's vision of peace to the world through our lives. As we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim Christ's life, death and resurrection as the hope of the world, as the fulfillment of God's vision on earth. We are not alone in sharing this vision. We are not alone in proclaiming this vision. We are not alone in living this vision. May peace come quickly here on earth. May it come quickly, indeed.

In the name of God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.

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*Because sermons are meant to be preached and are therefore prepared with the emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.*