

## **Faith, not fretting**

Jan Wiersma

Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

17th Sunday after Pentecost - October 2, 2022

Texts: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Psalm 37:1-9, Luke 17:5-10

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

The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw. O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous— therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

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. Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. 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. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

Psalm 37:1-9

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers,  
for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.

Trust in God, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.

Take delight in the Beloved, who will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Blessed One, and trust; God will act.

Your Advocate will defend you; the justice of your cause will shine like the sun.

Be still before our God, and wait patiently;

do not fret over those who prosper in their evil ways.

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil.

For the wicked shall be cut off from the living,

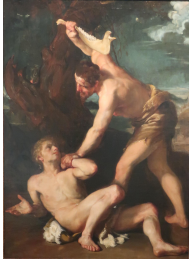
but those who wait for the Righteous One shall inherit the land.

Luke 17:5-10

The apostles said to Jesus, “Increase our faith.” And Jesus replied, “If you had faith no bigger even than a mustard-seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and replanted in the sea,’ and it would immediately obey you. Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or minding sheep. When he comes back from the fields, will the master say, ‘Come at once and sit down’? Will he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper; put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink; you can have yours later? Is he grateful to the servant for carrying out his orders? So with you: when you have carried out all your orders, you should say, ‘We are servants and deserve no credit; we have only done our duty.’”

You've heard of the three-point sermon? They were quite popular in the old days when sermons were allowed, and even *expected*, to last half an hour *at least*. I remember a visiting pastor in my childhood church; after droning on for at least 45 minutes, he woke the whole congregation up when he said, "And now for my second point."

Friends, I promise you three points in the next three minutes and then we can get to the serious business of singing - which was the only thing I enjoyed about my childhood church!



First point, the prophet Habakkuk. Though his words sound scary—justice is perverted, destruction and violence stalk the land—they should actually be reassuring. What we see today is nothing new. Different clothes, different hairstyles; different weapons, but the same mayhem. And God's truth keeps marching on. Slow but sure. The arc of the universe bends toward justice. Progress has been made. Ordinary people have more protections. We live longer, healthier, arguably happier lives. But we still can't see the future. So wait, walk your path, and keep the faith.

Second point, Psalm 37. Don't fret. Don't fret. Don't fret. Three times. We've talked about this before. Hebrew is such a vivid language. The word means, to kindle a fire. But here, it means to light yourself on fire. Last April 22, Earth Day, a photographer from Boulder, Colorado, literally did that, in front of the Supreme Court, to protest the destruction of the environment. Some people hailed him as a hero, but the result was: he died. Painfully. And as far as I can tell, we're still on our merry way toward burning up the planet. With fretting, the fire is inside. It's like internal self-immolation. We end up emotionally fried and absolutely nothing gets better. Again, the comfort rings through the warning: Wait, walk your path; keep the faith.

*(But...Jesus, my faith is so small; it likes to hide in out-of-the way places; under the bed, behind the refrigerator, in the junk drawer with all the other stuff I don't use much.)*

So—third point—like the disciples, we ask, "Increase our faith." (But not too much, please! I'm not



ready to fight any dragons.) Jesus says, "Relax. You don't really need much. Just a seed's worth." It sounds reassuring, until he goes into this next bit about servants working all day, and then coming in and working some more. But there is comfort here, too: there is joy in simply sticking to our task, doing the next right thing. He's not inviting us to Level 5 hurricane-grade faith that uproots trees and throws them into the Gulf; this is just basic, garden-variety faith. Wait; walk your path, keep the faith. Stay in harness and pull together. Take a load off your soul. Be grateful. Sing your praise. Amen.

***And that is what we did, in a hymn sing. I'll share first verses of the songs we sang and hope they bring a smile to you as they did to us.***

### **All Things Bright and Beautiful**

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.  
Each little flower that opens, each little bird that sings,  
God made their glowing colors, God made their tiny wings.  
All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.



### **Let All Things Now Living**

Let all things now living a song of thanksgiving to God our Creator triumphantly raise;  
Who fashioned and made us, protected and stayed us, by guiding us on to the end of our days.  
God's banners are o'er us, pure light goes before us, a pillar of fire shining forth in the night;  
Till shadows have vanished, all fearfulness banished, as forward we travel from light into Light.

### **The Lone, Wild Bird**

The lone, wild bird in lofty flight is still with Thee, nor leaves Thy sight.  
And I am thine! I rest in Thee. Great Spirit, come, and rest in me.  
The ends of earth are in Thy hand, the seas' dark deep and far-off land.  
And I am thine! I rest in Thee. Great Spirit, come, and rest in me.

### **Morning Has Broken**

Morning has broken like the first morning. Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.  
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning! Praise for them springing fresh from the Word.

### **Amazing Grace**

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now am found; was blind but now I see.

### **How Great Thou Art!**

O Lord my God! When I, in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds Thy hands have made.  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, Thy power throughout the universe displayed.  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee: How great Thou art, how great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee: How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

### **Take My Life**

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.  
Take my moments and my days; Let them flow in endless praise,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise!

## **Prayers**

God of mercy, so much that we think unique to our time and our world is endemic throughout human history. Help us to see the big picture; help us as your human children to grow toward your ideal, to become what you created us to be.

Create in us new hearts eager to do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with you; create in us *green* hearts, loving, protecting, and nurturing all of this threatened planet. Give us hearts of compassion to feel the suffering of others: whether it be from war, weather events, sickness, rejection, loss, or despair. Teach us how to pray for those with whom we share communion around the world today.

Teach us to befriend and help those nearest to us who are isolated, sick, or recovering, and all those we name in our hearts. Comfort all who mourn with the sure and certain hope of eternal life in you. **Amen**