

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Faith is a way of life"

Scripture: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; 3:[3b-6] 17-19 and Luke 19:1-10

Opening Hymn: Blest be the God of Israel 752

Closing Hymn: Come, thou long-expected Jesus 110

Children's Hymn: Hope is a star 119

Choruses: Whom shall I fear (God of Angel Armies), You are holy (Prince of Peace), Here I am to worship, Jesus Messiah

Choir:

Rev. Steve Filyk

December 2, 2018

First Sunday of Advent

Communion Sunday

Do you ever despair of the pain, the violence,
And the injustice you see in the world around us?

When Sears Canada closed its doors
few people were shocked.

The era of the brick and mortar department stores
Was going the way of the Dodo bird.

But just do a little reading
And you'll start wondering if things
Could have ended up differently.

"[Since 2005 at Sears] billions were paid out to shareholders,
while spending was slashed
and little was invested in capital improvements.

It effectively became an agonizing and protracted liquidation...
But while shareholders were getting rich,
the workers were getting cheated.

[A] new owner allowed the pension plan to become underfunded,
and failed to ensure there was sufficient money

to cover the health and medical allowances promised to retirees.

When [Sears finally filed for bankruptcy protection]
18,000 retirees learned that they were not only losing their benefits
but their pension would be worth about 80 cents on the dollar...

This has forced many of these former workers,
some now into their seventies and beyond,
to seek work in order to pay the bills.”ⁱ

A number of lawsuits are currently being contemplated,
But we can imagine that something less than justice
Will ever be obtained.

Not all of you have followed the Sears saga.
But maybe you've noticed that local story about Jessie Simpson.

Early one summer morning
“Simpson wandered into [a man's] yard...
after he had left a graduation party.

[Undoubtedly had a few too many drinks...]

[The owner] went outside with an aluminum baseball bat
and confronted Simpson.

The two men got into a fight,
and Simpson ran away to another yard...

[The owner] chased after him and attacked him...
[and] struck [Simpson] with the baseball bat...

A neighbour who called 911 reported that
[the owner] dragged Simpson across the street,
walked away and then returned
and kicked Simpson in the head..."

The owner eventually pleaded guilty to aggravated assault
And was sentenced to 7 years in prison.

But Simpson is now blind in one eye,
Has permanent brain damage,
And is living in a long-term care facility.

His sentence for wandering into the wrong yard that night?
His sentence is life.ⁱⁱ

Does injustice and violence bother you?
How about the pain that some people are forced to endure?

Back in 2017 *Kamloops This Week* ran a heart-wrenching story
About Darren Yusishen.

"[The] Kamloops man who was found to have a rare,
aggressive brain tumour...
received another devastating diagnosis –
a second tumour on the other side of his brain..."

[What made the] family's situation even more difficult
was the fact Yusishen and wife Tammy typically
[spent] much of their time
caring for their 12-year-old daughter Bella,

who has a genetic disorder...
and requires constant care...

"It's really hard to process the injustice of having this level of hardship –
the burden of these things occurring in our family,"
[Yisishen's sister] said.

"The injustice of any one of these things happening to a person
-- it's so heavy..."ⁱⁱⁱ

Now when I read this story I wanted to see what happened.
I hoped I would encounter a follow-up article
About the community supporting the family,
Maybe even a miraculous recovery.

What I found instead was an obituary.
Yusishen died this past January at the age of 40.

Now maybe you didn't come to church to hear such stories.
You already know stories like these intimately.
Sunday worship is an escape from these hurts,
Not a place to stare them straight in the face.

But every once in a while, you may start wondering
Why God allows such things to happen.

Isn't God supposed to be rooting out
Violence and injustice and pain?

PAUSE

Today we heard from the prophet Habakkuk.
Little is known about Habakkuk
Other than he was a contemporary of Jeremiah.

The book that bears his name
"was written during the final decline
of the southern kingdom of Judah,

probably after the rise of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (605 B.C.),
but before the fall of Jerusalem (586)."^{iv}

Habakkuk lamented the disorder and chaos that surrounded him.

Listen to John Calvin's paraphrase of those first few verses
That were read this morning:

"When all things are in disorder,
when there is now no regard for equity and justice,
and men abandon themselves,

as it were with loose reins,
unto all kinds of wickedness,
how long, Lord, wilt thou take no notice?"^v

In this way Habakkuk mimics those laments of the psalmist:

“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
 How long will you hide your face from me?”^{vi}

Habakkuk brings this lament, this complaint to the Lord.
 What we didn’t hear this morning
 Was the Lord’s response to this first protest.

“God’s answer is that [God] will destroy evil in Judean society
 by bringing the troops of Babylonia to overwhelm it.

Judah has rejected God’s [justice]; Babylonia’s will replace it.
 Judah has rejected the order and ways of its God;
 it will therefore serve Babylonia’s God.”^{vii}

Now this was not the sort of response
 That Habakkuk was looking for.
 He doesn’t want to believe that God would act in this way.

“How can a righteous God use the wicked Babylonians to punish Judah,
 which, though it has [rejected its God],
 is still better than the Babylonians?” [he argued.]^{viii}

Habakkuk makes his case.
 And we come back to today’s reading.

We are told that Habakkuk
 Stations himself as a sentinel, a watchman,
 And waits for God’s response.

And once again the Lord replies.

Let me read that section of the response
that was skipped in today's lesson.

And let me read it to you in Peterson's translation, *The Message*:

"Note well [the Lord says to Habakkuk]: Money deceives.

 The arrogant rich don't last...

Don't give people like this a second thought.

 Soon the whole world will be taunting them:

"Who do you think you are—
 getting rich by stealing and extortion?

How long do you think
 you can get away with this?"

Indeed, how long before your victims wake up,
 stand up and make *you* the victim?

You've plundered nation after nation.
 Now you'll get a taste of your own medicine...

"Who do you think you are—
 recklessly grabbing and looting,

Living it up, acting like king of the mountain,
 acting above it all, above trials and troubles?

You've engineered the ruin of your own house.
 In ruining others you've ruined yourself.

You've undermined your foundations,
 rotted out your own soul...

"Who do you think you are—
 building a town by murder, a city with crime?
Don't you know that God-of-the-Angel-Armies

makes sure nothing comes of that but ashes,
Makes sure the harder you work
at that kind of thing, the less you are?...
“Who do you think you are—
inviting your neighbors to your drunken parties...
All the time you were drinking,
you were drinking from the cup of God’s wrath...”^{ix}

The Lord promises Habakkuk
That the Lord will avenge the pain
The injustice, and the violence
That will be brought by the Babylonians.

And the Lord promises the same to us.
The Lord promises to avenge and defeat
Those evils that assail us as well.

But what are we to do in the meantime?

We are to wait.
We are to be faithful.

As we have already heard,
The Lord tells Habakkuk:

“the revelation awaits an appointed time;
it speaks of the end
and will not prove false.
Though it lingers, wait for it; [Wait for it!]
it will certainly come
and will not delay.

"See, the enemy is puffed up;
his desires are not upright—
but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness—"x
'The righteous person will live by faith.'
'The righteous person will live by faith.'

Friday night Katie and I watched *The Christmas Chronicles*.
It tells a story about a sister and brother, Kate and Teddy Pierce,
whose Christmas Eve plan to catch Santa Claus on camera
turns into an unexpected journey.

They end up stealing a car.
They end up herding reindeer.
They end up helping Santa do his last-minute deliveries.

The real story, however, is about Santa helping the sister and brother
Come together after the death of their father.
And it's about Teddy, the boy, getting his life back on track
After all his anger and his grief.

At one point in the movie Santa asks Teddy to grab the reigns
and pilot his high-powered sleigh.

While the sleigh moves forward it won't lift off the ground.
And they are heading directly towards a speeding train.

Santa tells Teddy he's got to have faith.
Teddy tells Santa that he believes in him.
Santa tells Teddy he's got to believe in himself.

When the Lord tells Habakkuk
That the ‘righteous person will live by faith’
This is not what the Lord’s talking about:
Believing in ourselves...

In our own power we are not going to solve global let alone local issues
Of injustice and violence and pain.

Our faith is a faith in God’s deliverance.
Our faithfulness is about stoking that commitment
And fueling that trust.

As one scholar notes:
“The word for ‘faith’ in the Hebrew is ‘emunah’,
which has the same stem as our word “amen.”

It signifies steadfastness, day-by-day commitment,
through prayer and worship, Bible study
and obedience, to the Lord.

Steadfastness is putting one foot in front of the other and walking,
ever surely, in God’s ways and not in our own.^{xi}

Faithfulness is a resolute and defiant posture.
It means we are trusting that God’s promise is true,
And that God’s justice WILL prevail.
Even, even when we need to wait.
When we need to wait for it.

For his part Habakkuk would not see that promised deliverance
His waiting would surpass his lifetime.

Many of our complaints will also need to wait years or decades
Even generations to see any redress.

For that same God who delivers is also patient and longsuffering.
A God who is “not wanting anyone to perish,
but everyone to come to repentance.”^{xii}

Like Habakkuk we will need to be patient.
Unlike Habakkuk, however,
we have a foretaste of God’s divine justice in Jesus.

Each time we share in the Lord’s Supper.
We are reminded of a God
Who has triumphed over pain, injustice, and violence.

He smothered it in his own body;
He defeated it by rising from the dead.

And he promises to share that same resurrection life with his followers,
Even as our broken and sinful world is being healed.

As we remember of God’s mighty act in Jesus
we are given strength to endure in the meantime.

We might even leave this morning and declare
alongside Habakkuk:

“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,

yet I [too] will rejoice in the Lord..."^{xiii}

Amen

ⁱ Gary Mason "The inexcusable treatment of Sears employees: A cautionary tale" January 19, 2018 *The Globe & Mail* <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-inexcusable-treatment-of-sears-employees-a-cautionary-tale/article37661479/>

ⁱⁱ Brady Strachan "Homeowner handed 7-year sentence for baseball-bat attack that left 18-year-old with 'life robbing injuries'" October 23, 2018 *CBC News* <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/homeowner-handed-7-year-sentence-for-baseball-bat-attack-that-left-18-year-old-with-life-robbing-injuries-1.4875587>

ⁱⁱⁱ Sean Brady "Devastating diagnosis for Kamloops man with terminal prognosis" September 21 *Kamloops This Week* <https://www.kamloopsthisweek.com/news/devastating-diagnosis-for-kamloops-man-with-terminal-prognosis-1.23240280>

^{iv} J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney "Book of Habakkuk" *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 556

^v Bryan Spinks "Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4 Theological Perspective" Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year C, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).

^{vi} Psalm 13:1 NIV

^{vii} Elizabeth Achtemeier "Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C; Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4" 498

^{viii} J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney "Book of Habakkuk" *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 557

^{ix} Habakkuk 2:5-17 MSG

^x Habakkuk 2:3,4 NIV

^{xi} Elizabeth Achtemeier "Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C; Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4" 500

^{xii} 1 Peter 3:9 NIV

^{xiii} Habakkuk 3:17-18 NIV