

October 5, 2025 – Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4 & Luke 17:1-10

There are times when the evil of this world feels a bit overwhelming. Of course, it happens when there's a major tragedy. A natural or man-made disaster that kills many. The murder of an important figure, like Charlie Kirk a few weeks ago. The revelation of a crime that seems unthinkable. Certainly, those headlines get to us.

Sometimes, though, it's not one huge evil that knocks us down, but a lot of little ones. This past Thursday, for example, we were sitting around the table at our breakfast Bible study and the TV was on in the background. And the news was on. And it was just one piece of bad news after another. A hurricane and building collapse and a government shutdown and a synagogue attack and a plane collision.

And it just wouldn't stop. None of it was overwhelmingly bad. Many of the situations were not nearly as bad as they could have been. But the non-stop bombardment was just too much. And when we prayed over breakfast that morning, I just wanted to ask God, "How long will you let this go on?"

That's not a new feeling. It was, in fact, the same feeling that Habakkuk had in our Old Testament lesson today. And the same prayer that he prayed. He looked out over Judah, the people of God, and what did he see?

Destruction and violence. Strife and contention. God's people despised his law and trampled his Word. The wicked surrounded the righteous. Those who should have loved God's truth twisted it for their own gain. And so the prophet cried: "*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you, 'Violence!' and you will not save?*"

You can hear the anguish in his voice. He's not a skeptic mocking God. He's a believer pleading with God. He knows God is righteous. But he can't reconcile what he knows with what he sees. Doesn't God care? Why doesn't he act?

And then comes God's answer. And it's an answer that almost makes the problem worse. "I am raising up the Babylonians," God says. "I will use them to punish Judah." But the Babylonians are even more wicked! They're violent, ruthless, arrogant, idolatrous. How can God use them as his instrument? Habakkuk is stunned. He complains again. In effect, he says, "Lord, your cure is worse than the disease."

Two different complaints, both of them familiar. The first? Evil in the world seems to go unpunished... how can God allow it? And the second? When God does act, when he does answer our prayers, it feels like he's gotten it all wrong. Instead of solving the problem, it gets worse. Instead of relief, we get more suffering. Instead of help, we get more confusion.

You can probably find examples in your own life, if you think about it. We ask God to stop the spread of evil ideologies, but then it only makes the persecution of Christians grow worse. We pray for peace, and we end up with wars. We pray for a new job, but then we end up crushed by stress. We pray for harmony in our families and end up with more conflict. We pray for patience, but God just gives us more reasons to be patient. And so, like Habakkuk, we ask, "Really, Lord? This is your answer?"

God's response to Habakkuk, and to us, feels rather unsatisfying at first. "*Write the vision,*" he says. "*Make it plain... If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.*" Wait for it. That's God's answer. Wait for my promise to unfold. Wait for my plan of salvation.

I don't know about you, but I don't like waiting. If I call customer service, I want them to solve my problem now, not say, "We'll get back to you." But that's essentially what God says here. He says my Word is sure. My promises will not fail. Trust me. Even if you don't see the answer yet, wait for it. It will come.

Martin Luther once said about this passage: "The flesh is neither able to believe in God when in temptation nor to trust that God is reliable and certain to keep his promise. So at this point Habakkuk fights against that doubt of the flesh."

It's the doubt of our sinful flesh that makes this so hard. We want to believe God's Word, but our flesh doubts. We want to trust his promises, but our eyes see only the evil directly in front of us. We want to be patient, but our hearts cry out, "How long, O Lord?"

And that's when God gives the great promise at the heart of Habakkuk's message: "*The righteous shall live by his faith.*" These words became the cornerstone of St Paul's teaching. He quotes this passage in both his letter to the Romans and the Galatians.

And they were the words that lit the fire of the Reformation in Luther's heart, when he discovered that righteousness before God is not something we achieve but something we receive by faith. They were words for Paul. They were words for Luther. And they're words for you today.

Because notice what God doesn't say. He doesn't say, "The righteous shall live by their strength." He doesn't say, "The righteous shall live by their works." He doesn't say, "The righteous shall live by their wisdom." No: "*The righteous shall live by his faith.*"

Faith is the key. Faith is trust in God's promise, even when everything else seems to collapse. Faith is holding onto God's Word when the evidence around you suggests the opposite. Faith is believe that there is a plan for your salvation, and it will surely come. It will not delay.

But faith is not some heroic virtue we muster up on our own. Faith is God's gift, spoken into our hearts by his Word. As St. Paul said: "*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.*"

God himself creates and sustains faith through the preaching of the Gospel, through the water of Baptism, through the bread and wine of the Supper, through the absolution spoken by a fellow Christian. The Augsburg Confession says it so clearly: the Holy Spirit works faith when and where he wills through the means of grace.

That's why the point is never to ask, "Do I have enough faith?" Instead, the point is to rejoice that God is speaking to you. He is giving you his promises right now. He is assuring you of forgiveness. He is pointing you to Christ crucified and risen. He is saying, "*The righteous shall live by his faith.*"

And God's promises are not empty. They've already been fulfilled in Christ. He promised Adam and Eve a Savior, and he sent his Son to crush the serpent's head. He promised through the prophets that one would bear the sins of the people, and Jesus bore them all on the cross. He promised resurrection and life, and Christ rose from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. He promises you forgiveness, and you have it in Jesus.

But let's be honest: it's still hard. Waiting is hard. Trusting is hard. Believing in the midst of suffering is hard. And that's why Jesus gives us a word about faith in Gospel lesson. He says that if you had faith like a mustard seed, you could say to a mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea," and it would obey you.

Because it's not about the size of your faith, but the object of your faith. A mustard seed of faith in Christ is stronger than a mountain of self-reliance. A mustard seed of faith in God's promise is greater than all the doubts the flesh can muster. Because faith is not about how tightly you hold on to God, but about how firmly God holds on to you.

And that ties us directly back to Habakkuk. The righteous shall live by his faith. Not because everything is clear or easy, but because God's Word sustains them. They wait for the vision, even when it seems slow, because they know it will come. They trust in Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises.

So when you look around and see evil unchecked, remember Habakkuk. God sees it too. His justice will come. Wait for it. When you pray and the answer seems worse than the problem, remember Habakkuk. God's ways are higher than yours. Wait for it. When your flesh doubts, when your heart fears, when your faith feels like only a mustard seed, remember Habakkuk—and Jesus. "*The righteous shall live by his faith.*" Wait for it. For even a mustard seed of faith in Christ will never be put to shame. Amen.