

When you looked at the bulletin this morning and saw the scripture reading, or when you heard our lay leader announce the reading for this morning, you might have thought to yourself, “*who in the world is Habbakuk?*”

If you did, that’s okay, you probably aren't alone.

This minor prophet from the Old Testament isn’t the most familiar name in the Bible.

But I picked this reading today because this is actually a rich text with lots of historical background that might just resonate with what’s going on for us today, in our world.

So, Habakkuk was an Israelite.

The text was written probably in the 700’s BCE, but we don’t really know.

Nevertheless, this was not a great time to be an Israelite, this was a very traumatic time for them.

They were constantly being threatened and invaded by foreign powers, and this moment is particularly treacherous.

Not long before this was written, the powerful Assyrian army destroyed one city after another, brutally killing Israelites and taking over the land.

And we know that not long after the text was written, the Babylonians, a brutal group of folks led by king Nebuchadnezzar, would attack Jerusalem 3 times!

And in 587 BCE, about 100 years after this was written, they destroyed the city of Jerusalem, including the Temple.

Then they took the leaders and skilled people into exile, hence the period known as the 'Babylonian exile.'

Although this hadn't happened yet, the Israelites are smart people and they knew how powerful the surrounding armies were.

They lived and breathed fear, fear of what was going to happen to them, of which empire would attack next.

This is the context in which Habakkuk talks to God, and he is writing from Jerusalem, the city with the biggest target on its back.

Now, I want to share a story with you that for me, metaphorically sums up how I am feeling in our current social and political climate.

"Last year in an eight degree wind chill the school bus was late.

Kindergartners and elementary school kids were bracing against the wind while parents did their best to keep reassuring looks on their faces.

One by one the parents turned their backs to the wind and placed their children in front of them.

And then without any out loud coordination, [the parents] pulled together so that [they] formed a human barricade against the harsh, cruel winter." (www.revgalblogpals.org, "Narrative Lectionary: Wait for it.")

It feels to me like our nation is in the midst of a harsh, cruel winter, and some people are feeling the effects more strongly than others.

The people who I think are like those children, who are being affected, are vulnerable people, immigrants, women, people living with economic insecurity, and so forth.

These are the people that I want to round up and turn my back to, to protect them against the verbal onslaught of hatred and vitriol that's being spewed at them.

We are living in a scary time for different reasons, and folks, it's not going away after November 8th.

A disease has been lying dormant in our nation for years and it's just beginning to show it's symptoms and it's not going away anytime soon.

As people of faith, we don't have the luxury of hiding our heads in the sand, of pretending everything is okay, of ignoring the divisions that are getting deeper and wider within our nation.

We all need to metaphorically be in the watchtower that Habbakuk referred to.

He said that he positioned himself there to listen for God, for we need to do that too.

But we also need to look out for those who threaten or condemn our values, so we can see them coming and know how to respond.

And just how do we respond?

I have another story to share.

A few weeks ago, a campaign office for a certain presidential candidate was firebombed.

Nobody was injured, but the office and everything inside was completely destroyed.

Immediately, someone from the other major political party started a GoFundMe campaign to raise \$10,000.00 to repair the office of their opponent.

The organizer of the fundraiser said, *“This is a moment for graciousness, not fractiousness.”* (“Democrats raise funds for GOP after North Carolina headquarters firebombed,” www.FoxNews.com).

That is how we respond, my friends, with love and compassion and support of the other.

Especially of the other.

And there’s another benefit to being in our watchtower.

Not only are we able to see what’s coming, or get a better idea of what’s happening on the ground, when we remove ourselves from the chaos and the noise, we’re able to listen more closely to God speaking to us, as Habakkuk did.

When you turn off the tv or close the paper or turn of the radio or shut down the computer, in the stillness of the quiet, that’s when you can speak to and listen for God.

I encourage you to do this, as you might be surprised by how God responds.

One thing I love about this scripture is that Habakkuk is SO honest with God.

He does not mince his words. He asks, *“O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?”*

Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save?

³*Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble?*

Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.

⁴*So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails.”*

I have felt like this a lot recently, but I am not usually directing my prayers at God so much as I’m just yelling at other people, under my breath.

To those whom I disagree with, I say...

“How long must we yell that this isn’t right, and you don’t listen?”

*We cry that we need a different way of talking to each other, a different way of making decisions for the collective good and yet **you** people keep perpetuating divisiveness and now violence and contention have arisen and justice will never prevail.”*

It’s all your fault. Thankyouverymuch.

It's in these moments when I need to go up to my watchtower and talk to God, because God can handle whatever I have to say.

I am doing nobody any good by directing my anger towards other people, but God, well, if the prophet directed his anger at God, I figure we can too.

Now, Habakkuk and his people were living in fear.

He was railing against God because the Israelites were afraid for their homeland, their livelihoods, their very lives.

They were afraid of the looming violence that they knew would be inflicted upon them, for it was only a matter of time.

In other parts of the book, Habakkuk laments the ruthlessness of the Babylonians and he's lamenting the plight of his people in this text.

South African theologian, Denise Ackermann says that, "*Lament... is the sound suffering makes when it recovers its voice.*" (Baldwin, Lewis. January 18, 2010. www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org).

There are many among us who are suffering and who are afraid and who are lamenting the current state of the way things are in our nation.

I think about people living in fear of losing their health, of not being able to afford healthcare, of losing their independence and wondering how they'll care for themselves.

People live in fear of being vulnerable, of not being able to protect themselves, or God forbid, they live in fear of something happening to their children.

Many of us live with debilitating fear, which is being fomented by our current social and political climate.

And technology isn't helping to abate our fears.

We are more digitally connected than ever before, which not only leads to an unhealthy 24/7 stream of information, but we are more socially isolated than ever before.

That loneliness is adding to our fear and things are a mess.

My friends, this is why we all need to get on that watchtower, to draw closer to each other and closer to God.

We need to draw each other in, hold each other close, check in on one another, and remember that we belong to each other.

God told Habakkuk that God had a vision for God's people for the appointed time and that it did not lie.

Friends, we must not forget the vision that God has for us, that we are capable of living together amicably, peacefully, of caring for one another, of hearing each other's fears and reassuring one another we will be okay.

Now, to have a vision sometimes means that people think you are crazy.

This is because it requires extraordinary sight, an anticipatory spirit, imagination, and the capacity to dream what might appear on the surface to be impossible.

So the naysayers and the cynics will doubt us and say that we'll never be a unified nation or world, we are too divided.

But I say that I am standing in the watchtower and I see a better, safer, more peaceful and prosperous world in our future.

If we are willing to make it so.

So, draw together dear ones, put those in the center who are the most vulnerable so we can protect them, and let us make sure everyone knows that the circle is wide enough for all.

This is not an exclusive circle.

There's always room for one more as we lean into each other, to protect each other.

These relationships in which we respond to hatred with love, intolerance with compassion and fear with understanding, they have the power to change the world.

If we do this, I have the audacity to believe that we might actually be able to manifest the vision that God has set before us in this time.

Amen.