

Sermon: "Wait for It" Pentecost #17 (C) Luke 17:5-10: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4;; Psalm 37:1-9;
 II Timothy 1:1-14 October 5, 2025

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How long do we have to wait? How long do we wait for the wars in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, to name a few, how long do we wait for them to end? How long will it be that children, regardless of race, religion or ethnicity have enough food to eat so they can grow up and thrive? How long before hostages are released, occupation ends, immigrants are treated as people of value and provided safe havens to work and raise their family? How long will it be for a nation...our nation...to live united and work toward the common good of all people? And how long will it be for truth to prevail and the skewed ideal of Christian Nationalism stopped in its tracks? How.. long.. will the horrible atrocities against humanity end? How long, O Lord, will we have to cry out for your help? Can't you see the children buried in the rubble or children (people) dying at the hands of those who hold automatic weapons and fire at random in schools, grocery stores, theaters, places of work...or churches? God, don't you see the violence and injustice throughout the world? How long, how long, how long O...Lord? How...long....

This week I found myself sitting with the prophet Habakkuk and feeling, perhaps, the same sense of despondency - of hopelessness, that the prophet and the people of Judah were feeling. You see, Habakkuk is in a heated exchange with God of behalf of his people. Let me insert a little geography lesson here to get the full picture of the turmoil that was mounting between Babylon and Egypt. You see, Judah was smack dab in between these competing world powers. The people were fearful and anxious that they would be collateral damage if the warring nations would collide. And to make matters worse, corruption in Jerusalem was on the rise. The rich were getting richer and the poor were scraping the bottom of the food bins. Times were bad all over for the faithful Jewish community in which Habakkuk prophesied to for some time. And feeling the people's pain and suffering, Habakkuk goes to God. And God lets Habakkuk rant and rave and go on at length.

"How long," says Habakkuk, "Am I going to cry for help, Lord...and you will not listen? There is violence - the Hebrew word here for violence is wrongdoing - everywhere. How come I see the destruction, devastation and strife and you don't, God? And your law that was established to protect the people and bring about a joyful response to your grace through acts of mercy and justice...well, that law has become "slack" and corrupt." Habakkuk takes a breath here,, waiting for God to respond but to his dismay, God fails to directly respond to his question, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

This is probably a good time for me to take a break here, and break from my rant and raving, too. Because as I said earlier, this text really got my blood boiling this week. And quite frankly, I need to take a breather because I'm not too thrilled in God's response to Habakkuk. God's response to Habakkuk, much to *my* dismay, is ...wait. And for those who know me well, I don't do "wait" very well. I say that in jest, but who wants to wait and watch people continue to suffer, die and be buried under the rubble every...single...day?

Who wants to wait while some people receive healthcare and some do not? Who wants to wait while children in our own community don't have sufficient food so they can think and thrive like the student sitting next to them? God's Habakkuk and perhaps me...and maybe you, too, is to wait. And trust me, wait is NOT what I want to hear when a loved one is struggling with alcoholism and addiction, or in anticipation of a devastating diagnosis that will be life-altering, or a marriage in crisis, broken systems and broken hearts. While reading the text this week, I noted a scribble written in the margins of the text from Habakkuk, from 2019. It reads, "OMG, oh my gosh, this is what's happening today - brutality, gun violence and injustice." I even penned a response to God within that notation, "WHAT? WAIT? WHY God?"

In 600 BCE it was a difficult time in Israel's history. In 1945 the world was at war; in 1964 legalized racial segregation, discrimination in this country appeared to run the show; in 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine, Oct 7, 2023 the horrendous massacre of innocent people in Israel occurred; in 2024, 2025... You get the idea. And if you're anything like me, this certainly isn't the good news I was longing for today.

But in the context of the prophet Habakkuk, and I surmise in our context today, the people needed faith, faith in God's faithfulness in order to carry on and live with hope. And if that truly was an inspirational source of energy for the people then, how much more strength do we have now, when we have come to understand and to see... the fullness of God's having already been faithful to his every promise through Jesus in whom God's every promise finds its "Yes"?

However, in the *context* of God's response to Habakkuk, he is given an assignment. Yup. Something to *do*. The Lord tells Habakkuk to "write a vision" and distribute it "all over town". A visual reminder to the people to live by their faith, to wait for God's promises to be fulfilled. To have courage, to wait patiently, and to live between "complaint and struggle" on one hand, and God's "right time" on the other. This *is*...people, where we live as people of faith. In the midst of struggle... and in the midst of the promise that God, too, weeps over Jerusalem, weeps over those who lost their lives in Grand Blanc, weeps for those who are

unjustly treated over and over again. But do we have enough “faith” to wait...in the midst? How much do we need?

In our gospel lesson from Luke today, the disciples wondered the same thing when they demanded Jesus to, “Increase our faith!” You see, in the previous stories leading up to today, the disciples had just been told the cost of discipleship...caring for those in need, protecting the vulnerable, reaching out to the lonely, befriending the friendless, and if you cause a little one to stumble - your fate is worse than drowning; forgive someone again and again and again; sell *all* their possessions and contribute to the common good. Honestly, no wonder the disciples petitioned Jesus for more faith. Quite frankly, I would, too. Quite frankly, I...DO.

So how much faith do we need to make a difference? How much, Jesus? And you gotta love the response that Jesus offers the disciples, in fact, it even sounds like a rebuke, and all they're doing is asking a question about faith...they're overwhelmed!!!

Jesus replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.

And...“Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? But will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?

Maybe..this was a teachable moment for the disciples. Jesus uses these two, what would appear to be unrelated parables - to describe what living by faith looks like. The tiny, tiny seed can grow in stature and flourish. And the parable of the slave, as Jesus tells the story. Reward and praise was not necessary for what they were expected to do. Faith, as Jesus describes it ..is...just doing your “job” on behalf of the kingdom of God. Now personally, I believe it's important to encourage people and give them a “well done, good and faithful servant” pat on the back. Not because you have to. But perhaps you see a value in it - or in that person. But works done in faith, you see, isn't a commodity. It doesn't fluctuate like the Dow Jones. It doesn't increase in value so you can perform BIG tasks on behalf of God's kingdom here and now.

Maybe there's more to this story when Jesus' followers ask for an increase in faith. Perhaps there's more to our story when we fail to see the seed inside of us... is enough. David Lose writes, “More” faith, does not bring a certain kind of...certainty - maybe even superiority. Because if that's the case, faith becomes an accomplishment and sometimes it's an antidote to struggle and sometimes, with enough faith... (televangelists tell us) we can conquer doubt, dismiss illness

and justify economic hardship or prosperity. But Jesus suggests that the gift of ordinary faith is enough. Because faith, you see, is your identity in Christ. You have everything you need to put one foot in front of the other and be the hands and feet of God. Even the simplest things... done in faith... can have a huge impact.

And it is only from a profound belief and faith in the goodness of God that the prophet, Habakkuk, could look at the state of the world around him and cry, "How long?" Yes, the world is a mess today and my heart aches as I know yours does, too. But it is not the size of the seed that matters; or how long you've been engaged in this faith business, it's the potential of the life within each one of us that makes the difference.

You know...this group that Jesus assembled may resemble a group of people like you and me, yet the impact of their ministry will become immeasurable. The impact of our ministry at First Lutheran, is immeasurable, too.

****How long, O Lord, before the suffering ends? Wait God says. You are people who move from desperation...to doing.**

****How much faith do we need to love a world in dire need of it? You have enough faith, Paula, Shar, Roger, Bill**

****How daunting is the task before us? It's BIG, God says, that's why you do it, together. You are "in it" together. Amen.**