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Habakkuk 3:1-19 – *Feeling the Wait: Led to Trust*

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Habakkuk 3:1-19

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet.

² Lord, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord.
Repeat them in our day,
in our time make them known;
in wrath remember mercy.

³ God came from Teman,
the Holy One from Mount Paran.

His glory covered the heavens
and his praise filled the earth.

⁴ His splendor was like the sunrise;
rays flashed from his hand,
where his power was hidden.

⁵ Plague went before him;
pestilence followed his steps.

⁶ He stood, and shook the earth;
he looked, and made the nations tremble.

The ancient mountains crumbled
and the age-old hills collapsed—
but he marches on forever.

⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,
the dwellings of Midian in anguish.

⁸ Were you angry with the rivers, Lord?
Was your wrath against the streams?

Did you rage against the sea
when you rode your horses
and your chariots to victory?

⁹ You uncovered your bow,
you called for many arrows.

You split the earth with rivers;

¹⁰ the mountains saw you and writhed.

Torrents of water swept by;
the deep roared and lifted its waves on high.

¹¹ Sun and moon stood still in the heavens
at the glint of your flying arrows,
at the lightning of your flashing spear.

¹² In wrath you strode through the earth
and in anger you threshed the nations.

¹³ You came out to deliver your people,
to save your anointed one.

You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness,
you stripped him from head to foot.

¹⁴ With his own spear you pierced his head
when his warriors stormed out to scatter us,
gloating as though about to devour
the wretched who were in hiding.

¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses,
churning the great waters.

¹⁶ I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound;
decay crept into my bones,
and my legs trembled.

Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity
to come on the nation invading us.

¹⁷ 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,

¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Do you *really* believe that God knows what he's doing? (Michael Williams, *Jesus Lens*)

When you look at the condition of the world...

The things you read about and watch on the news...

When you look at what's going on in your own life...

Your own struggles and hardships...

And the struggles of those close to you...

When you look at these...

Do you *really* trust that God knows what he's doing?

Listen again to the conclusion of 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,
¹⁸ *yet I will rejoice in the Lord,*
I will be joyful in God my Savior. (3:17-18)

This is the end of the book...

Words of confidence and trust in the Lord no matter how desperate the situation.

Even when their main crops and livestock—

Their sources of food and income—

Even when these are taken away—

And life is painted as barren and bleak—

Habakkuk will be joyful in the Lord.

This is where Habakkuk finishes—

At a place of rejoicing and worship—

But it's not where he starts.

Habakkuk starts in a place of lament and questioning:

“How long, Lord, must I call for help,
 but you do not listen?

Why do you make me look at injustice?
 Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?” (1:2-3)

Habakkuk looks around at the current state of affairs in Judah...

And what he sees is not good.

What he sees is injustice.

In our congregational readings this month, we've been looking at justice...

How justice in God's eyes is dignity and fair treatment of *all* people.

All people are created in God's image...

So *all* people deserve to be treated with respect.

God's concern in Scripture is especially for the immigrant, widow, orphan, and those living in poverty...

A big piece of justice in God's view is taking care of these—

The most vulnerable in society.

Habakkuk looks around and says that there is injustice;

There is wickedness;

There is destruction and violence;

And the law is pushed to the side...

This law that is meant to protect the vulnerable.

Justice is not being done...

And Habakkuk feels the weight.

So he laments:

“God! Why aren't you doing anything about this?!”

“How long are you going to let this go on?!”

How many times have we asked that same question—

Either for ourselves or on behalf of others—

“How long, O Lord?”

How long will people at the US/Mexico border be detained...

How long will children be separated from their families?

How long will violence and poverty drive people from their homes in the Middle East and Central America...

Leaving them no choice but to travel thousands of dangerous kilometers—

Being preyed upon by those trying to take advantage of their situation—

All in hopes of finding a safe place to live?

How long, O Lord, will people in Edmonton live on the cold winter streets?

How long will young women and men in Edmonton be tricked and forced into sex trafficking?

How long, O Lord, will the gap between the rich and the poor continue to grow?

How long, O Lord, will the economy struggle...

How long will people be without work?

We see and experience the injustice of the world—

And with Habakkuk, we lament—

We cry out to a God who seems like he's not there.

But what God does for Habakkuk—

What God does for his people down through the centuries—

God appears.

God reveals himself.

We're going to use the word "theophany" (theo=God, phainein=appear)...

When God makes himself visible to human beings.

There was the theophany at Mt. Sinai...

When the Lord appeared to Moses in the thunder and fire. (Exo 19)

There was the theophany when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush.
(Exo 3)

Isaiah experienced a theophany in a vision when he saw God seated on his throne.
(Isa 6)

And now God appears to Habakkuk.

Our passage this morning is Habakkuk's report of God's appearing to him.

And this is what turns Habakkuk's perspective...

This is how he moves from lament—

Skepticism about how God is allowing things to happen—

Into a place of trust—

And not just confident trust—

But joy.

What are some things we notice about this theophany?

First, God is there.

To Habakkuk and to those seeing and suffering injustice...

It may seem like God is absent—

But he powerfully says, “I’m here.”

In the midst of your struggle...

In the midst of all the injustice...

“I’m here.”

And who is this God that appears?

He is the God who comes from Mt. Paran and Teman.

Mt. Paran is down by Mt. Sinai.

Teman is a little north of this, between Sinai and Jerusalem.

What Habakkuk is saying is that this is the God of the covenant...

This is the same God who met them at Mt. Sinai.

The same God who called Israel “my treasured possession...” (Exo 19:5)

This is the one who brought them out of slavery in Egypt...

The one who delivered Israel from her enemy.

He is now with them in their trouble in Jerusalem.

And this God comes in power:

He shines as bright as the sun;

And his envoy—

That travels before and after him—

Are pestilence and plague...

Which reminds us of the plagues that came upon the Egyptians;

Mountains tremble and the earth quakes at his presence;

First, we see that God is there...

The most-powerful God of the covenant.

Second, we see that God is there to do battle.

God is like a warrior with horses and chariots...

His bow is not concealed...

It is out and arrows are in his hand.

In his other hand is a spear...

A spear that he operates with quickness and precision.

This is not a weak or indifferent God...

Who forever lets injustice and wickedness go unchecked.

God is depicted as a warrior dressed for a battle...

Ready to set things right.

Finally, what we notice about Habakkuk's theophany—

How God appears to the prophet—

Is that God comes on behalf of Israel.

"You came to deliver your people," he says. (3:13)

Just as God allowed the Israelites to pass through the Red Sea on dry ground...

And then swallowed up the Egyptian army in the waters of the sea...(Exo 14)

Habakkuk sees God doing something similar to his enemies:

"You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters." (3:15)

In this theophany, Habakkuk experiences God fighting on behalf of Israel.

This is the God who once delivered them from Egypt...

Now he has come to save them again.

This vision does something to the prophet:

His heart pounds within him;
 His lips quiver like a child who has just experienced a bout of wailing;
 His legs tremble;
 And he feels a decay enter into his bones.

In this theophany—

This appearing of God—

Habakkuk is overcome by fear and awe at what the Lord is going to do...

And this is what changes his perspective.

God's appearing leads him to a place of trust...

Where no matter what happens...

Through famine and poverty...

No matter how long it takes...

Weeks, months, or years...

He will trust in the Lord.

“Because God is here...”

“Because I know that God is for us...”

“Because I know that God is in control...”

“I can trust.”

And this turns him to worship the Lord in joy.

A theophany has altered Habakkuk's perspective...

The awesome power of the Lord.

And a theophany alters our perspective too.

But ours is unlike any theophany ever experienced...

Because God appears to us in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate theophany...(Justin Holcomb)

Where God becomes one of us...

God the Son lives among us.

But notice how he comes to us...

Not in power, but in humility.

He doesn't come as a warrior with arrows and spear in his hand;

He doesn't come to us in a cloud of rumbling thunder and flashing lightening;

He comes to us as a baby, born under the starry Bethlehem sky...

Not born to royalty...

But born to two, young unsuspecting parents.

And this trend of humility continues...

Because this baby grows up to be a servant:

He tends to the poor;

He eats with tax collectors...

And others hated by society;

He ministers to those with skin diseases;

He washes the feet of his friends...

Those who will soon turn on him;

In short, he does justice...

He takes care of the vulnerable.

And eventually he takes care of us...God's people.

Jesus Christ—the ultimate theophany—comes to rescue his people.

This same God of the covenant who saved the Israelites from Egypt—

Who saved the Israelites from the Babylonians—

Now comes to save his people from their sin.

And this trend of downward humility is completed in his death...

When he willingly dies on the cross, paying the price for our sin.

But this is not a weak God—

This is not an indifferent God...

This is not a God who has limited control—

Because this God is raised from the dead and ascends to heaven...

And now we have the promise that he is going to come back.

And this time he will come back as a warrior.

He will come back ready to do battle:

To fight for the oppressed and imprisoned immigrant;

To fight for children living under abuse;

To fight economic and social systems that keep the poor in their place;

To do battle with the evil of the world and finally set things right.

This is the theophany that has shaken us:

It's causes our legs to tremble;

Our lips to quiver;

And our hearts to beat uncontrollably inside of our chest.

Jesus Christ—the ultimate theophany—turns us from our confusion;

He turns us from our place of hopelessness;

He turns us from our despair;

Turn us from our skepticism...

And he says, "I'm here."

"I'm in control and I'm here."

"You are my people and I am here for you."

And this theophany turns us to worship, and opens us up to joy.

Even as we feel the wait...

As we long for injustices to be corrected;

As we wait for the Lord to do something about everything that is wrong around us;

We wait with trust.

And as we wait for Christ to come back in power and in might...

We wait and we live as he lived.

We live humble lives.

We take the first step and reach out to those on the street.

We look them in the eye and greet them with a smile;

We listen to them and allow their lives to impact ours;

They're not charity cases, they are people worthy of dignity and respect.

We listen to the voice of the vulnerable...

People who use our position and our power to make sure they're heard...

Advocates of the oppressed.

We are people who speak up at injustice...

Even if it means that our reputation or resources are at stake.

We are people who spend our time praying...

For those who don't know the Lord;

For those who are vulnerable (elderly, special needs, poor, widows, foster children);

And for those who are suffering without hope.

And we do this in the power of God's Spirit...

Who is here with us and in us now as we wait.

We may lament the injustices of this world...

But we wait with confidence.

Because we have seen the Lord—

Because he has appeared and revealed himself to us—

We know that he is for his people.

We know that he is for the vulnerable.

We know that he holds all of the power...

And we know that he is in control.

In this season of Advent...

As you feel the wait of this time in-between Christ's first and second coming—

May he lead you into the trust and joy that comes from knowing he alone is God.

Amen.