

October 5, 2025—The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. James Wyatt

Increase Our Faith

“O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgment comes forth perverted.”

Who could have guessed that “the oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw” was actually a news broadcast from two thousand, six-hundred-some years in the future?

I’ve been having this recurring feeling over the past few years that there’s really nothing new under the sun, as the Teacher wrote in Ecclesiastes, that human nature hasn’t changed and the whole idea of human progress is kind of a myth. Too often, I look around at the violence and hatred and oppression in the world and I feel like, really? Haven’t we advanced past this yet? Have we learned nothing?

In Morning Prayer the last couple of weeks, we’ve been making our way through some challenging parts of the books of Kings, with some pretty grisly details about various kings going to war with each other and the horrendous death of queen Jezebel. In some ways these texts seem so very ancient and foreign and—well, pretty horrible. To the point that I felt this week like I had to do some explaining about why we even read them. They are our history, in some sense—the history of our spiritual ancestors and a record of what they believed about our God, even if that doesn’t always square very neatly with how Jesus revealed God to us. But even though it’s true that these stories are ancient and horrible, maybe they’re not actually that foreign. And maybe the only reason they seem that way is that many of us are pretty sheltered from the horrible and grisly things that are still going on all over the world. I’m thinking of war zones, of course, like Israel and Ukraine and Sudan. But this morning I’m also thinking of Chicago, where federal agents have been raiding apartment buildings and homeless encampments. And I’m also thinking of the folks who come to Fresh Start on Mondays, who are probably not that surprised at the idea of Americans experiencing violence at the hands of government agents. And in that context, the story of Jehu’s bloody coup—shooting King Joram of Israel in the back and killing King Ahaziah of Judah and overseeing the death of Jezebel and slaughtering the followers of Baal—seems no less horrible, certainly, but maybe a little less inconceivable.

“Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgment comes forth perverted.”

That’s Habakkuk’s complaint about the state of the world sometime around 600 BCE, and it is a complaint that seems just as relevant looking at the world around us now. So what answer does God give to the prophet Habakkuk and to us?

“For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie.” So—you know how lots of people were talking about the Rapture a couple of weeks ago? Do you know where that started? Some guy in South Africa, Joshua Mhlakela, had a dream and talked in a podcast interview about how he saw Jesus on a throne and heard him say, “On the 23rd and 24th, I will come to take my church.” That’s it. Some guy had a dream. And this video clip went viral, especially on TikTok. Now, I have no idea how many people did things like quit their jobs, or give away their cars because they thought they wouldn’t need them any more, or give away their pets because they feared they wouldn’t be around to take care of them after being taken up to heaven. I hope that number is very small. I know that the video went viral, at least in part, because of people making fun of the idea. But it sort of boggles my mind how one guy’s dream can spread across the internet to the point where some people seriously believe it’s a God-given revelation about the end of days.

And yet, Joshua Mhlakela could just point to Habakkuk and say, “There is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it”—I

guess he's reinterpreted his dream and started saying the rapture is coming this week instead. "It will surely come, it will not delay."

But here's the thing: When God says to Habakkuk, "The righteous live by their faith," that faith has nothing to do with some supposed Rapture. That faith isn't about getting airlifted out of this broken world so the righteous don't have to "see wrong-doing and look at trouble" any more. That faith is described in the third and last chapter of Habakkuk's little book, and it sounds like this: "Though the fig tree does not blossom and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; who makes my feet like the feet of a deer and makes me tread upon the heights." (Hab. 3:17-19) That faith is about rejoicing in the presence of God even when the world is falling apart around us. It's about being in the world, and by our presence and our faith—our deep trust in the goodness of God—transforming the world.

Because the fact is the faith of the righteous *has* changed the world. It's true that there are still tyrants, there's still corruption of justice, wrong-doing and trouble, people still succeed in evil schemes, as our Psalm this morning said. But though plenty of things haven't changed, some things have. Because we have this idea, this faith, that all people are made in God's image and carry an inherent dignity because of that image—and that faith has helped to foster human rights around the world. So many things seem to be going wrong in the world right now, but when they are turned around—and they will be turned around—it will be because of that fundamental faith that we are all brothers and sisters and siblings, children of one loving God.

"The righteous live by their *faith*," God said to Habakkuk—not by their credulousness, their willingness to believe that some guy in South Africa got a vision from God announcing the date of the end times. "The righteous live by their *faith*"—not by their intellectual assent to certain propositions about the nature of God and Jesus, their agreement with every word of the Nicene Creed. "The righteous live by their *faith*"—not by their skepticism about science and the basic facts of biology and astronomy. "The righteous live *by their faith*"—by their ability to sit in the midst of all this and rejoice in the Lord, and exult in the God of our salvation. The righteous live by their *trust* that God is good, God is at work even in this messed-up world. The righteous live by their *hope* that God still does have a vision for this broken world—a vision of restoration and repair, a vision of peace and justice, a vision of the world made new and every nation and people from every time and place, brothers and sisters and siblings all coming to feast at God's big kitchen table together.

And so, with Jesus's apostles, we pray, "Increase our faith!" So we might live by that faith, that trust, that hope—and that with that faith we might transform the world.

Amen.