Text: Habakkuk 1-2

**Introduction**

What gets different people asking “Why?” is different. My friends all drive Porsche’s, Lord why won’t buy me a Mercedes Benz? I must make amends.

It is easy to laugh along with Janis there. It’s a stock trait of comedy laughing at the perceived tragedies of those born on third base or who have come into great wealth. There is certainly a little of that in Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Oh poor Prince Hamlet. It was the entire point of Paris Hilton’s Simple Life. And even part of setting up of go-fund-me’s for Martha’s Vineyard recently.

Of course that last one includes another side. The illegals or migrants whose hopes and situation might be more likely to inspire “why” questions.

Hurricanes and other weather events are a perennial cause of “why?” But such weather related “why’s” inspire in some the “old man yells at cloud” meme response – “what are you gonna do, it’s weather.” Or a bit harsher, “if you don’t want hurricanes, don’t live in Florida.”

There are all kinds of things that kick off “why” questions. And the worst response to “why” is the game of comparative suffering. Because even if in a purely cold world the comparison is ridiculous, in the real world it is still someone’s suffering. And both simply laughing at it or even worse trying to win a game of comparative suffering just doubles down on everyone’s misery.

**Text**

And a deep truth is that “why?” must not really be that interesting of a question. Or the actual answers are beyond our ability – at least right now - to take in. Because God just doesn’t answer them that often. Or maybe more precisely his answer is always this cross. He did not spare himself what any reasonable person would score an ace in the comparative suffering game.

Most of the time when “why” comes up in the Bible, you get God in the whirlwind from Job. “Who are you to darken my counsel with words without understanding? Were you there when I laid the foundations of the deep?” But today’s text is one of the very few times God attempts an answer to why?

Habakkuk is writing around 610 BC from Jerusalem. It is well prior to the final exile in 586 BC. But it is in the aftermath of the Good King Josiah’s reforms. They got the dream king they wanted…and nothing really changed. We think that if we just got our guy, if the world just did things our way, it would turn into the big rock candy mountain.

Habakkuk is looking around at the results of King Josiah’s reforms and taking measure. And he sees all the same problems. God still feels absent. “How long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?” Senseless violence continues. “I cry violence and you will not save?” The righteous suffer and the wicked prosper and even the laws of Josiah do nothing. “The law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth.”

“God, why do you allow this? Why do you not do something?”

Now our lectionary reading this morning shortens both Habakkuk’s questioning and God’s answer. What it cuts out is God’s first response to “why don’t you do anything.” God’s first response is in Habakkuk 1:5-11 if you want to look it up later, but His first response is “Habakkuk, I am doing something, look closer.”

“Look among the nations and see, wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. Behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans.” That’s Babylon. And God goes on to describe the Babylonians as this terrible pride machine that runs over everything. God’s answer to the problems in Israel is to bring Babylon. God’s first answer is that the parade of horror amplifies. “They all come for violence…They gather captives like sand. At kings they scoff and at rulers laugh…they pile up earth and take it…they sweep by like the wind and go on….”

Such an answer doesn’t sit well with Habakkuk. It wouldn’t sit well with us either. God, why don’t you do something. Oh I am doing something, I’m making it all worse. I’m handing sinners over to their sin.

**Moral**

But that is the legal answer to why. It’s the same answer that Paul talks about in Romans 1. “Therefore God gave them up.”….the apostle says it three times…God gave them up…to a myriad of sinful conduct. And the giving up, the handing over, ramps up until even those who know God’s righteous decrees not only do evil but give approval to those who practice evil. If you can’t beat them, join them, celebrate them.

Habakkuk, you think Israel is bad…and it is…but wait until you experience Babylon. And Babylon will eventually experience Persia…and Persia Greece…and Greece Rome. The purpose of the law is to increase the sin. What am I doing Habakkuk? I am making the sin of the world unmistakable. As you are groaning right now Habakkuk, the entire world shall groan in its bondage to sin. All creation is subjected to futility.

But that legal answer is like comparative suffering. Is this really it? Ever increasing futility?

When Habakkuk renews his questioning, that is the line he takes. “Are you not from everlasting to everlasting O Lord my God…are you really going to fill that everlasting time casting out your net to dredge up another beast from the deep worse than the last?”

“Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?”

Is that The LORD? Is that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God who promised the Land. The God who brought us out of Egypt out of the house of slavery? Were all those complainers in the desert right, you just brought us out here to die? We were better off in Egypt?

And Habakkuk takes the place of faith. That is not the God that he has come to know. That is not the God Habakkuk has been a watchman for. I don’t understand right now God, but I will take my stand at the watchpost…I will look out to see what He has to say.”

**Christological**

And the LORD answers Habakkuk a second time.

Habakkuk, “write this vision, make it plain on tablets.” Carve it into stone. Carve it into stone so big that someone driving by at 80 mph on I-10 will be able to read it.

The vision awaits its appointed time. Oh it comes, the day hastens, it won’t prove false. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will come.

And what is this vision? It’s the vision of the God who does not cast nets for greater monsters, but sends out fishers of men.

It’s the vision of the God who does not forever hold sin against us, but turns in mercy. No longer killing nations forever, but gathering those of every nation, tribe, people and language.

It is the vision of the God who not only endured the cross – sharing our sufferings – but rose from the dead. God has done something. Christ is risen. The violence and injustice of the world did not stand. The law that went forth perverted under Pontius Pilate was reversed and justice done when Christ came out of the tomb. The innocent one was raised.

This is the proclamation on the tablet. Christ is risen.

**Eschatological**

Christ is risen, and you too shall rise.

You have been buried with him in baptism, and you shall share in a resurrection like his.

That is the day the broken will mend and all the sad songs will end.

That is the day the violence ends as sword are beat into plowshares.

That is the day justice goes forth and satan’s lying ceases. When Christ shall raise his scepter decreeing endless peace.

That is the day.

That day awaits the appointed time. When all the graves shall open and the sea give up its dead.

That day awaits the appointed time. The end hastens. The world now groans for that day awaiting the revelation of the saints. That day is not yet, but it is not a lie. Because Christ is risen. The firstfruits of the dead. One tomb is already empty. That day has already come to one of us out of time. Christ is risen. That day merely awaits the full number.

If it seems slow, wait. Who would you like to cut off from the Kingdom? Do you and I have better timing that God? It will come.

That day will come.

And until that day comes, the righteous shall live by faith. The righteous shall join Habakkuk on the wall watching for the Herald of The Day. We join Habakkuk in faith in the God of Israel.

**Conclusion**

Why?

It’s a sinful world. It’s a world in rebellion against its creator.

Why doesn’t He do something?

He has. Christ is risen. Satan has been defeated. He prepares a place of justice and peace.

We believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Wait for it. That day comes. It comes at the appointed time.