Text: Habakkuk 1:1--2:4

**Introduction**

We are going to ponder the Old Testament lesson today. It seems timely. But we are going to have to fill in some spaces. The lectionary just deletes a couple of things. God’s first response the prophet and the prophet’s rather bold second complaint. Homework. Take 5 minutes this afternoon to read the rest of chapter 1. You could read the entire book in that time. It’s short. The second thing is that I think we have to start somewhere else. To ponder what Habakkuk does, I think you have to start with Adam and Eve and a Snake.

Whether you are Milton writing Paradise lost, or C.S.Lewis writing Perelandra or the Stones, extra biblical depictions tend to have a bit of Sympathy for the Devil. For being known as the original liar, his arguments have an unnerving amount of surface truth. Old Scratch’s first and primary argument is that you cannot trust God. That God is the bad guy and he just wants to keep you slaves. God wants to keep you down. He’s got this garden here and all he does is make you keep it. “For God knows that when you eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” And then God won’t have his childlike docile slaves.

Satan just wants to open your eyes. Satan wants you to know. Of course Adam and Eve take it and know, and they immediately know that they are naked and in trouble. There are lots of things that I think we wish we could un-invent. Say nuclear weapons or gain of function on viruses. Too early to say if AI is on that list. This is the problem of knowledge. If it doesn’t come with the wisdom of how it is to be used, it gets used for violence. And wisdom is slower than knowledge. It took Adam tending the garden and naming everything to come to the wisdom that it wasn’t good that he was alone. And God provided. It is not that God doesn’t want us to know. We will know at the proper time. What God wants is for us to trust him, to have faith. To believe that God is not just after slaves, but sons, and fellow wise rulers of a kingdom.

**Text**

But we do know. And our knowledge keeps increasing. And we put more and more of this earth under our dominion – as was the original charge – but so often without wisdom. Instead of just Kingdoms, we have their Satanic mockery. And that is what Habakkuk complains about. He takes his complaint to God. “How long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you ‘Violence’ and you will not save?”

I’m imagining we’ve all said something like that at some point. We’ve put God on trial. Looked at some atrocity and demanded He answer. We want to know.

An Habakkuk develops his complaint. I think of it a bit like the reverse “broken widows policing.” God “why do you idly look at wrong?” You let the turnstile jumper go because it’s such a small offense. But when you let that guy go you embolden all his buddies. And then you have roaming gangs of scofflaws painting graffiti, harassing the innocent and even killing them. “Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.”

And before you know it, federal buildings are burned. And criminals who killed people are released repeatedly to do it again. And we are making up reasons for why that this is fine. “So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted.”

And yes, I’m just painting with current events. You could tell this same story in multiple ways. This is a universal complaint after all. God, why are you letting them win. Fill in your own them.

And I completely understand why the lectionary skips God first answer to Habakkuk’s complaint. We absolutely don’t want to hear this. “Behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation.” And God continues to describe what they are like. “They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves…they all come for violence…they pile up the earth and take it.” Habakkuk, Habakkuk, if you only knew. I see the Violence of my people. I see the corruption of the law. And I am not doing nothing. I’m sending the Chaldeans. You will really learn what it is like to live without the law of God. You will learn what real violence is. You want a temporal Savior? I’m sending one. The violence and faithlessness of the Jewish monarchy and priests will stop.

And Habakkuk is aghast. “Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy one?” – question mark. “You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong (Pause)…why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?” You cannot be serious God. If you are the God you say you are, the Chaldeans cannot be your answer. That just makes everything worse. Can’t you see that?

And Habakkuk develops a nifty metaphor. “You make mankind like the fish of the sea…and drag them out with his net.” And every time something gets worse, throw the net in. Let a bigger fish take care of the problem and pull the problem fish out. Is that really your plan God. “To keep on emptying you net and mercilessly killing nations forever?” That is only a temporary solution. Until the bigger fish becomes and even greater problem fish. What happens when you have a world fish? A beast that bestrides the whole earth?

And that is where our lectionary picks back up. Habakkuk might be aware of how brusque he has been with God. “I will take my stand at my watchpost…and look out to see what he will say.” God, it’s not that I won’t do the job, fulfill the call. I’m keeping my watch. But what do I say? You really want me to go tell your people good news, Assyria…Babylon…Persia…Rome…London…Moscow….New York…Beijing…is coming!

**Application**

And God deigns to answer the complaint. And it is not with words like to Job, “who darkens my counsel with words without knowledge.” God answers the earnest complaint of his watchman.

Here is what you are to say. Carve it on tablets of stone. Either make it so big that people running can still read it. Make it a billboard. Or put it in a form that it can be taken by runners everywhere. Write the vision.

And what is that vision? The vision that it has always been. The woman will bear a son who will crush the serpent’s head. The virgin shall conceive and bear a son whose name is Immanuel. I, I myself will shepherd my people. And my servant David shall be prince among them. A stone cur by no human hand will crush those idol Kingdoms. The King shall come when morning dawns and light triumphant breaks. Write the vision.

“For still the vision awaits its appointed time…wait for it, it will surely come, it will not delay.”

Now we have seen parts of that vision. The virgin has given us Immanuel. Satan has been defeated. Christ sits at the right hand. The vision did not lie. It became real at the appointed time. We know more. But Habakkuk’s vision is still for us. We still wait for the fulfillment.

In one way this old world continues on as it always has. Nation against nation and people against people. Violence and justice perverted. But hopefully we have learned some wisdom with the knowledge. The Kingdom of God is real and eternal, but it is not of this world.

Those who are looking for the Kingdom to reveal itself in this world – “Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him.” I prefer how the NLT puts it, “Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked. (Hab. 2:4 NLT)” The Kingdom of God does not show up to fix this old world. This old world is passing away with all its faults and sins. But the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. The Vision is carved in the stone. The Kingdom of God certainly comes, we praying that it comes to us also.

And it comes to us not by knowledge. You have all the knowledge you need. Christ is risen. Your sins are forgiven. He will return to gather all his elect. The vision has been carved. It will surely come.

But how does it come?

The righteous shall live by faith.

This old world continues under Satan’s rules. You can almost forgive Adam and Eve, when they bought it they were working on nothing. But we know. We know what Satan’s rules lead to. Violence and destruction, and perverted justice. There is always a new Babylon. And none of them will save.

But the righteous shall live by faith. Because God is working a vision. The Kingdoms of this world are becoming the Kingdoms of our LORD. And every knee shall bow and tongue confess. And on that day in the new creation, The King shall decree his peace which will not be broken.

Have faith, if it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come.