

PENTECOST: SHARING NEW LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 3, 2010

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4
Psalm 37:1-9
2 Timothy 1:1-14
Luke 17:5-10

Life Among the Wicked

“O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?
Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save?” (Habakkuk 1:2, *NRSV*).

“Do not fret because of the wicked...” (Psalm 37:1a, *NRSV*).

The prophet knows that evil is a problem. The psalmist knows that the wicked “will soon fade like the grass” (Psalm 37:2a, *NRSV*).

Which is it, Lord?

The prophet knows that “do not fret” is not an adequate response to those who have suffered the trauma of injury and injustice. Even if the wicked will fade, they are here now, and they are all too strong. “Destruction and violence are before me; ... The wicked surround the righteous” (Habakkuk 1:3,4, *NRSV*). The prophet cannot rest. What he sees afflicts him, and his unanswered cries for help cut as painfully – maybe more so – as the suffering he witnesses.

A number of people have noted that some prophetic literature seems to describe symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It should hardly be surprising. Witnessing or experiencing violence is shocking. We are created for good, and violent perversions of this divine purpose shock and terrify us.

The effects of trauma are not confined to an unlucky few. All those who witness violence and injustice are hurt. Victims, bystanders, and perpetrators alike are damaged. It skews us, it knocks us off a more idyllic or healthy path, sometimes off the path of righteousness. And though it may be self-evident, it must still be said that violence and injustice can be fatal.

The prophet *must* speak of the real anguish, which is a true experience, and a crisis for all the faithful.

But the Word of God is not one dimensional. Because God suffers *with* creation, God also speaks from *within* anguish. And God speaks not only *about* anguish, but *to* the anguished.

Sometimes it may be easier to hear from a voice outside our own tradition.

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it – *always*” (Mahatma Ghandi).

Ghandi was himself brutalized by the wicked. But he knew what the prophet and psalmist knew. God’s will *will* be done. Not soon enough by our likes, but inevitably. In God’s Kingdom, the wicked cannot write the last chapter. As Habakkuk says, “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; it will surely come, it will not delay” (2:3, NRSV, see also Psalm 37:6-7).

Wait for it? You say wait for justice, wait for healing, wait while we are in the midst of suffering!?

Sometimes we may think that “wait for it” means “do nothing.” But that is not the counsel of prophet or psalmist.

“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.... Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret – it leads only to evil” (Psalm 37:5, 8, *NRSV*). We might not be able to change the evildoers, or the fact that the wicked surround us. But we do not have to let them define us. Preoccupation with evil prevents us from claiming that which is good, and provokes us to return evil for evil. It is better – perhaps not easier, but better – to keep our eyes upon the Lord.

In truth, one way out of violence and injustice is simply to try to incarnate the kind of world we hope God is bringing about. “The righteous live by their faith,” says the prophet (Habakkuk 2:4, *NRSV*). *Living* by faith ... the most active kind of waiting imaginable.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Paul Bellan-Boyer. To learn more about his work, visit his blog at citycalledheaven.blogspot.com.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Mongolia – with thanks to God for the completion of corrections to the common-language Mongolian Bible, and for progress on the revision of the formal-equivalence Mongolian Bible; and with prayers that these Scriptures will be a blessing to the growing church in Mongolia; and for God’s guidance and protection over all those involved in Christian work; **Taiwan (Republic of China)** – with thanks to God that last year they were able to donate Bibles to people affected by typhoons and floods, and provide the Hearing Bible for the visually impaired; and with prayers for sustained work on the Chinese Study Bible; and for continued funding toward the Study Bible; **Hong Kong** – with thanks to God as they celebrate their 60th anniversary this year; and with prayers for the completion and publication of the RCUV Bible; and with prayers that this Bible will bless Chinese people and churches worldwide; for strength and wisdom as they partner with other Bible Societies to promote and distribute Bibles; for new opportunities for Scripture distribution

and engagement; and for the work in Macau; **Japan** – with thanks to God as they celebrate the 150th anniversary of the work of the Protestant Churches in Japan; and with prayers as they renew their dedication to continue in the footsteps of the early missionaries who played a significant role in Bible work, especially in the area of translation, to bring God’s word to people in Japan and Japanese people in other countries; and for their work.

Activity Corner: “Active Waiting”

Supplies Needed: Bible, white paper, pens/pencils, crayons

Read Psalm 37. The psalmist encourages us to be patient as we wait for the LORD to deliver us from the evils of this world. This week’s reflection challenges us to take action while we wait. Take a moment to discuss within a group some of the ways in which we can promote peace. Give each person a sheet of paper and allow them to create an activity that can bring peace to a community where there is war / injustice / unfairness. For example: “hand out to high school students, leaflets with a message of peace and good will toward their peers” OR “Write letters to your local newspaper and give your views on the benefits of being a peacemaker.” Younger children may be encouraged to draw a picture that reflects peace. Close by having everyone pray the *Prayer of Serenity*.