

Sermon – October 30, 2016 – The Church of the Holy Cross -- The Rev. Jamie S. Samilio

I want to start this morning with the reading from Habakkuk, because the passage had such a clear and relatable message in it.

Habakkuk boldly addresses God challenging God's conduct toward the community and the individual. With bold, strong words he asks, "*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?*"

Has anyone ever spent time with kids, and especially toddlers during their terrible twos! As Aunt Jamie, I have spent plenty of time with frustrated kids. This passage sounded a lot like what you might hear from a frustrated child or one throwing a tantrum at their parents, "This is all your fault." And, "How much longer do we have to wait?" "Are we there yet? It sounds familiar and it is a common reply when someone is frustrated and does not have the whole picture of why things are the way they are. Habakkuk was lost, frustrated, throwing a tiny tantrum and he just wanted God to fix everything. His lament holds God responsible for a world where there is violence, wrong doing, where justice gets twisted, crooked, and bent out of shape, a world where the wicked surround the righteous, and are often left at their mercy. Habakkuk seems to be asking, "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

We ask this too, when we do not get what God is doing. We do not have the whole picture and we just need to be faithful. God answers Habakkuk and tells him to hold on to the vision, to write it down, and to be faithful. And that means doing the sometimes unglamorous work in front of them – even when the end is not in sight .

If Habakkuk were living by faith, then he would know that faith is believing in something that you cannot see. I think it was Martin Luther King that said, "*Faith is being willing to take the steps, even when you cannot see the staircase.*" Habakkuk needed to learn to live by faith, and we need to learn to live by faith as well. The best way I know how to do that, is to hold onto hope.

I will try not to be too messy tying the lesson from Habakkuk to the Gospel story of Zacchaeus, but no promises.

I was in grade school in the 1960s being taught by the good Sisters of St. Joseph in an all girls parochial school. The music scene at that time was filled with some amazing artists, but if you asked my teachers, none were more popular than *The Singing Nun* or more exciting than, *The Medical Mission Sisters*.*

I remember music class like it was yesterday, with Sr. Mary Olive playing the hammered Dulcimer, while no doubt dreaming of being the next star of *American Missionary Idol*. We learned to sing the hit, *Joy is Like the Rain*, and Zacchaeus. The lyrics to Zacchaeus reflect the Gospel story: *There was a man in Jericho called Zacchaeus. Now the Hebrews they were tall, but Zacchaeus, he was small, but the Lord loved Zacchaeus better than them all*

Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector – not the most popular person in the town as you might imagine. He was rich and had all the comforts that money could buy, but was surely lacking in friendship, fellowship, and faith. The thing that struck me about Zacchaeus was him seeking to see Jesus. Something was missing in his life and Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, to hear His message. In fact he was so desperate, he climbed a tree to get a view. Jesus saw him and called to him, and people grumbled – we had grumbling in Habakkuk, and now more grumbling in the Gospel. The crowds were unhappy because once again, Jesus picked the person the crowds liked the least, someone considered small in both stature and morality, and they called Zacchaeus a sinner. The crowd did not see the whole picture. There would not be less salvation for them, if he was also saved.

When Jesus called to Zacchaeus it proved the promise that anyone who seeks Jesus will find Him – and Zacchaeus was a child of Abraham just like the crowd. *"Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."*

If you seek to see Jesus, be assured that Jesus will see you too. That day something changed for Zacchaeus. He went from being morally small, to spiritually tall, and he repented. He agreed to make reparations for his wrongdoing. This was a 180 degree turn for the chief tax collector. Seek Jesus, you will be seen; you will experience the joy of salvation. When we seek Jesus, we will be seen by Jesus, but we must do the seeking.

Zacchaeus took responsibility for his actions, and in the past few weeks we have been talking a lot about taking responsibility for our actions, treating others in our community as partners in our success, and as a people, being responsible for each other and our common goal to thrive and prosper. We must take responsibility for our sins, repent, and then work together – even when we cannot see the whole picture, we need to keep focused on the vision we have and work faithfully to see it through.

I wonder what life was like for Zacchaeus after that day? It was clear that he grew spiritually, but I wonder if he was able to deepen his engagement with his community and establish new relationships. Did he go beyond making amends for his wrongdoing? Did he broaden his reach to help the poor and marginalized in his community? I like to think so.

We are here at Holy Cross seeking Jesus and Jesus sees us. Jesus has called us as individuals, and as a community to do God's work in the world? Stay true to the vision God has for your life and for this community. Focus on our vision and faithfully do the work day-in-and-day-out, that will realize that vision. Build relationships with each other, engage in worship and fellowship that grow you spiritually, and broaden your reach by engaging others in partnership for ministry.

We have a vision for Holy Cross, and like told Habakkuk to do, we have written it down. And you, each of you, "whoever you are and wherever you are on your journey of faith are welcome here to receive God's love, freely given." This is our vision – to have Holy Cross be here, a place where all are welcome. Our vision is to broaden our reach, deepen our roots, and grow spiritually as individuals and as a community. Do not be frustrated about wanting instant gratification, to see the end, our promised land, it will not happen all at once. The Holy Cross vision is becoming reality because we are answering the call to do the work we are given to do today -- in this time and place -- through every pot of coffee brewed, every event hosted, every stranger welcomed, every formation class taught, every dollar given, every person prayed for, or cared for, married, or buried.

Living in the moment and working toward a vision when you cannot always see the end, can be a slow and sometimes frustrating process. We want our vision to manifest itself in front of us, instantly. And when that does not happen, when our desires do not instantly appear, we blame when what we need to do is have faith, hold onto hope, and take the next step on our journey together.

Have you seen the movie "The Most Fabulous Marigold Hotel?" It is set in India and is a story about the opening of a retirement community against all odds. The protagonist in the story is ever hopeful and pushes on, building relationships along the way, and his cause gains momentum. His mantra through all the challenges he meets is this: "In the end, everything will be all right. And if it is not all right, then it is not the end."

Seek to see Jesus, you will be seen by Him. Repent your sins, and like Zacchaeus, you will go from being morally small, to spiritually tall. Faithfully do the work God has called you to do. Walk with your sisters and brothers in Christ to make our common vision a reality. Amen

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*[From Wikipedia:

The Medical Mission Sisters are a [religious congregation](#) of women in the [Roman Catholic Church](#) founded in 1925 and dedicated to providing the poor of the world better access to health care. They were formerly officially known as the "Society of the Catholic Medical Missions".

The North American headquarters for the Congregation came to be established in [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#) in 1964 when, like [The Singing Nun](#) (Soeur Sourire) had done a year earlier - the Sisters began singing their own homegrown brand of spiritually-themed folk music as an aide to the medical health and wellness they professed.

Word got round the music community, and a year later in 1965 one of the most prolific of these composers, Sister [Miriam Therese Winter](#) had composed what would become a [Grammy](#)-award-winning worldwide hit *Joy is Like the Rain*.^[1] Response was so strong to the song that other songs were written and a marathon eight-hour recording session was commissioned in Philadelphia in early 1966, at which not only this song, but dozens of others which would make up their first five albums were recorded.

Immediately after the session, the original Sisters - save Sister Miriam herself - were scattered across the seven seas by the four winds in their missions to God in order to bring their healing touch and their much needed medicine to the far corners of the developing world. In 1972 the sisters released the first music not recorded at the original session in an album entitled *I Know a Secret*.

The Sisters music is still an integral part of their healing mission, and new music is continuously being written and recorded for a new generation of music fans the world over.]

Almighty and merciful God, it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*.

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Old Testament

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw.

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.

I will stand at my watchpost,
and station myself on the rampart;

I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,
and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

Then the Lord answered me and said:

Write the vision;
make it plain on tablets,
so that a runner may read it.

For 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.

Look at the proud!
Their spirit is not right in them,
but the righteous live by their faith.

The Response

Psalm 119:137-144

Justus es, Domine

137 You are righteous, O Lord, *
and upright are your judgments.

138 You have issued your decrees *
with justice and in perfect faithfulness.

139 My indignation has consumed me, *
because my enemies forget your words.

140 Your word has been tested to the uttermost, *
and your servant holds it dear.

141 I am small and of little account, *
yet I do not forget your commandments.

142 Your justice is an everlasting justice *
and your law is the truth.

143 Trouble and distress have come upon me, *
yet your commandments are my delight.

144 The righteousness of your decrees is everlasting; *
grant me understanding, that I may live.

The Epistle

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.

To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."