

October 2, 2016  
Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

Proper 22c  
HOW LONG O LORD?

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Mall shootings! Mall stabbings! Police shootings! Riots! Wars! Terrorist Attacks! School Shootings! Abuse allegations against Brad Pitt! The ruthless murder of the unborn! Violence! Violence! Violence! Violence is seen all around! Maybe it doesn't hit you personally or maybe violence has. A week ago the State of Minnesota mourned and grieved yet again when Jacob Wetterling was finally given a proper burial. Violence ended a boy's life nearly 30 years ago! The countless headlines of violence on the news day in and day out are endless. Open your selected news website or the Grand Forks Herald or the Crookston Times and violence litters the pages!

The only question one can ask is the one Habakkuk asked: *"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not here? Or cry to you 'Violence' and you will not save?"* Habakkuk is crying about the injustice being done against the people by the King. King Jehoiakim to be precise. We read about this King in 2 Kings 23 and 24. We read that King Jehoiakim reigned and did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

He did not follow the laws of God. Habakkuk touches on that when he writes: *So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth! For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted!* The law is paralyzed...the law is growing cold! There are several types of law at play in our lives!

What happens with civil laws? They are made with a certain idea in mind on how to control the population...but the next president, the next governor, perhaps even thinking of time, the next week the laws are paralyzed. Someone wants something different! For even today it seems that growing quickly the wicked are surrounding the righteous and justice will go forth perverted! Two cases to watch our Judge Neely of Wyoming who's under attack for her stance on marriage between one man and one woman. Judge Neely is a member of our church body. Pay attention to a bill that was introduced and taken down in California, that I'm sure will come up again that will force Christian Universities to give up federal funding or comply with the "anti-discriminatory laws" for the GLBTQ community. If that does come to fruition it will in essence close Concordia University-Irvine and there will be a trickle down affect across the country.

You see violence now! You see injustice now! But wait, you will cry out even more! How Long O Lord? Of course though you see Strife and contention as well, even in your own personal lives. Interpersonal conflicts with family, friends, coworkers, and even fellow church members. We even cry out here, "How Long O Lord?!"

We cry out violence and ask the question along with Habakkuk because there is another law at work. Not civic law, but the law that is written on human hearts. St. Paul writes: <sup>14</sup> *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.* <sup>15</sup> *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them* <sup>16</sup> *on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.* <sup>1</sup>

It is this law that is still at work! It is this law that is living and active that compels us to cry out “Violence!” To cry out, “How Long O Lord?” It is this law that brings us face to face with the judgement of God, even when that judgment has a harsh word to say about our own thoughts, words, and actions and our own inactions. I look at my life and see my own times that I have treated others poorly, when I have ignored others, I need to repent, for the law is at work! It tells me that I am a sinner that is damned. It says the same thing to you!

But even then we wait! Habakkuk waited! He says, *“I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.”* <sup>2</sup> Will God answer?

Of course, God always answers! <sup>2</sup> *And the Lord answered me: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.”* <sup>3</sup> *For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay* <sup>3</sup>

Habakkuk cries out to God and He answers! We cry out to God and He answers! God answers because He promises to answer! God’s answer is that the future is in His hands! Indeed it is! Walter Bruggeman and noted Old Testament scholar writes this: “Thus the provisional resolution to the issue of theodicy is eschatology, that is, the future is secure in Yahweh’s governance even is the present is unbearably out of control.” Which means that God’s answer to human suffering is always hope! *“If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.”*

What is the vision that the Lord directs Habakkuk to write down? What is it but what we see with the eyes of faith? Indeed, it is the prophet’s closing line in today’s text that inspired Paul to quote him in Romans 1 and even Luther when He was hit by it in his study of Romans: “But the righteous will live by faith.” This even relates to our gospel reading from Luke 17 when Luke records the following: <sup>5</sup> *The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”* <sup>6</sup> *And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ro 2:14–16). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Hab 2:1). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Hab 2:2–3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

*uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.* <sup>4</sup> The apostles too cried out the Lord and He answered!

Dear Brothers and sisters in Christ, it takes faith to cry out to the Lord in times of distress and it takes faith to trust the Lord will answer.

And faith is a gift! You, the righteous will live only by the grace of God! It takes a gift to cry out to God and when He answers He gives you gifts, faith to hope in a future that is brighter than you could even imagine. Faith to hope that one day this violence, this injustice will all be over! Faith to hope that one day sin will be removed and creation restored. Faith to hope that one day that the curse will be undone and resurrection will be ours! This faith was given to you at your baptism when you died with Christ and were raised to live your life free of sin, yet while struggling with the daily battle of the Old Adam and the New Man.

This faith continues to be given to you when you kneel and receive the Lord's Body and Blood that He sacrificed for you on the cross. There at the altar you receive a gracious gift...forgiveness of your sins and an answer to your question of "How Long?" The wrath of God ended for the Christian at the cross. Another way you can say is that the violence of God ended for the Christian at the cross, with the brutal death of Christ. Now the violence is ended...but not yet...wait longer, for the Resurrected King is going to come back and take care of the violence and will end it once and for all.

That will be glorious day and we along with the entire Church in heaven and earth will continue to cry "How Long O Lord?" Even with that we pray, "Come Lord Jesus, Come Quickly." We pray that the Lord would hasten the day of his return, for the day of His return is what we hope for! It's the day that is promised to all of us who believe, to live for eternity in body and soul without violence, without suffering, without sadness and without sin. We will on this restored creation in perfect peace. For now we still cry out "How Long O Lord" by faith and we still live in this life by faith and we can only live in the life to come by faith given to us by our Savior!

In Jesus Name! Amen!

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.*

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<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Lk 17:5–6). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.