

On the Ramparts
 Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4*
 17th Sunday after Pentecost
 October 5, 2025
 St. Paul's, Jackson
 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always.

I speak to you with a heart that is filled with anger and grief. I am angry. I am overwhelmed with sadness and some fear. The attack of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints in Grand Blanc is almost more than many of us can bear.

I feel as if it has become in our country, open season for any angry boy or man with a gun to act out his feelings of isolation, despair, inadequacy, and untreated emotional mental health needs in the most publicly devastating way. This hunting season has to end.

I have legislative, political, social thoughts and commentary on all that is happening in our United States of America in the 8th month of the 47th Presidency of our country. That is not a surprise.

But this morning, I want to look at what's happening in our country from more of a scriptural and theological perspective. I think the prophet Habakkuk has insights that can assist us in this fear-filled time.

The prophet Habakkuk
 lives in a time—
 when it seems as if
 the bad guys are winning
 and the evil ones are prospering.

*He says to God,
 "Hello! How long
 will I cry to you
 and you will not listen?
 Or cry to you, "Violence!"
 and you will not save?
 ...Destruction and violence
 are before me,
 strife and contention arise.
 So the law becomes slack
 and justice never prevails.*

Habakkuk says, *"The wicked surround the righteous..."*

In my own prayers I hear myself daily lamenting, "Holy one, help us, heal us, hold us. Holy one, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, protect us, heal our wounds."

Habakkuk lives in a time
—right before
the Babylonians invade Judah
around 600 BCE.

A time when everything
Habakkuk holds dear—
may well wind up
rolled in the mud
and trampled underfoot.
He is appalled with the actions of his own people,
his leaders, his government
—he is fearful of the invasion
that looms on the horizon.

Nothing feels settled
—nothing feels right.

Last Sunday afternoon as I heard the news of the shooting and fire in Grand Blanc, I heard myself say, "Holy one, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, help us, protect us, heal our wounds. Where are you?"

I saw the flames, I thought of my friend a Mormon bishop, my interfaith colleagues who run the Latter-day Saints congregations in Bloomfield Hills and Farmington Hills, I swore and prayed to God asking, "How much longer do we have to wait?"

So much like Habakkuk.

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Yet, though he is surrounded by evil
—Habakkuk also knows of good,
 God-fearing, God-loving,
 Torah-living people.
He knows well of the people
 who have up-held God's commandments.
What he cannot understand—
 is why is it—
 that these good ones suffer also?
Why is it
 that the faithful ones
are not being spared by the God

who has chosen them?
 Biblical theologian, Eugene Peterson says, that
 unlike other prophets
 who tend to speak
 God's word to the people
 —Habakkuk—speaks
 the people's word to God.
 Habakkuk speaks the people's word to God.

Habakkuk is the faithful prophet
 —who looks at the inadequacies,
 and inequities of the world and asks God,
 “Why aren't you doing more to fix this
 —and assist us—your chosen ones?

He says, “Where are you God?”
 Explain your actions—
 Or as Eugene Peterson writes in *the Message*,
 “You can't condone evil!
 So why don't you do something about this?
 Why are you silent now?
 This outrage!
 Evil men swallow up the righteous
 and you stand around and watch?”

Or as Woody Allen put it some 2500 years later
 —“OH I believe in God.
 I believe in God,
 I just think God is a bit of an underachiever.”

What are you doing God?

Habakkuk then says,
 having asked God the question.
 Having said,
 “Where in heaven's name are you
 and why are you letting an evil nation
 take its revenge on us
 —a God fearing people?”
 Where are you GOD?

Habakkuk, unlike so many of us
 —who will spew these words
 and then return to our lives
 as they were before
 —absorbed again only in our own lives, fixated on what we can see right before us—

Habakkuk—does not utter these questions and then turn away, going on with his life.

He of all prophets—
 sets himself up to hear the answer—patiently
 ready for God.
 refusing to lose himself
 in the day-to-day grind of his on-going life.
 Instead, he reformats everything and says,
 “It is as if
 I am a soldier at a post—
 gracious God.
 I will stand at the rampart—
 with my eyes open
 and my ears cocked.” (Waiting. Listening.)

He waits and he listens.
 All senses attuned to where God might be.
 He makes it his sole job
 —to wait for God’s answer.

It is in the waiting
 and the praying
 that his life shifts.
 It is then—that he sees God all around.
 He sees and hears God’s promise.
 It is like that great C.S. Lewis quote,
 where he says,
 “I don’t pray to change God—
 I pray to change me.”
 In Habakkuk’s
 waiting his eyes and ears are opened—
 and he is drawn, he is open,
 to that GOD- time—

Habakkuk
 listens and waits
 and then hears God say to him,

“Write this vision—
 make it plain and in
 big block letters
 on the tablets
 so that a runner going by can see it.
 This vision message
 is a witness pointing to what’s coming.
 It aches for the coming—
 it can hardly wait. And it doesn’t lie.

If it seems slow in coming,
wait, it's on its way—it will come in God's time."

This waiting that we do, friends, this waiting for God's word, God's healing presence is not something we do, hiding behind protective walls, this vigil is not done in secret, cloaked in darkness, damp with despair, this waiting like Habakkuk's waiting is on the ramparts, proud and public.

As pastor Donna Schaper says, "While we wait, we do small things to keep the vision alive within us...consider the Native American wisdom: It is not the last swing of the ax that fells the tree, but all the pressure that has gone before it. Do not think of the hundredth stroke, but of the accumulative force of the previous ninety-nine," (*Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4* p 247).

We wait, we do not turn away from the pain. We bear public witness; we demand that we and others continue to see the ills of the world. We wait and continue to act in every way we can, together, showing our faith in our God and God will be with us and for us, forever and ever.

Amen.