

Trinity 19 2016

Habakkuk 1. 1-4, 2. 1-4

Habakkuk a prophet from the OT we seldom hear, even his name does not give any clue to his background or character.

It is thought he may have lived around 600 BC.

Yet, what we hear when we read this book has surprising echoes to the situations we know today.

It is short book, only 3 chapters which can be read as a valuable ancient text to look at against circumstances, in our own and other countries.

H. is concerned with dangers, justice and oppression in his own country - this powerful poetry still rings true to us in many parts of the world today.

H. is a man of God, a thoughtful caring individual who feels trapped - he is caught between contemporary evil and corruption; and his faith in God who seems to do nothing about it.

So he has the kind of moment we can understand when he shouts out “Where is God” and “What is he doing?”

How often I wonder have we cried out when faced with a difficult situation – maybe to do with law and order, our own or our family's health or seeing good people suffer “Where are you God why don't you do something?” Our prayers appear unanswered.

H. continues his cry for help “How long must I wait, but you do not listen?” In later verses that we did not hear he is told to “wait” for God to do something quite amazing, this come in Ch. 2 v.20. In the meantime he must live by faith, which is one of the themes of this OT book.

The Faith we are to live by is not man's faith but the faith God gives to those who live in harmony with him.

In such a situation faith must be our watchword, faith that means a long term commitment and a quiet confidence in God, who may even be at work in those who are causing our difficulty.

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for says St, Paul in his letter to the Hebrews.

2 Timothy. 1 1-14

Again in our second reading from Paul to Timothy there is an encouragement to be faithful. We can feel an intimate relationship between Paul and Timothy.

Paul urges Timothy to fan the flame of his faith – for says Paul we are called to serve Not with a spirit of timidity but with a spirit of power, love and self discipline.

Not all of us have the joy in winter of a fire in our sitting room, a fire which we tend to by lighting the wood, and by fanning the embers when they die down to encourage the flames and prevent the fire from dying out.

So how do we fan the flames in God's gifts to us? And what fuel can we add to the fire of faith in

our own lives?

Like Timothy we may be fortunate and had a Mother or Grandmother who had a faith in their bloodstream which they passed on to Timothy – they laid the fire in him as he grew up.

Paul also reminds Timothy of the time he laid his hands on him (can we remember the feel of hands laid on us when we were confirmed?) to commission him for his work in Ephesus, and gifted him for his ministry, in so doing he gave Timothy a new spark for his faith, to bring the fire back to life.

Paul we must remember was at this time in prison so urges Timothy not to be ashamed of what has happened to him, because says Paul the gospel is worth suffering for.

So to we must not be ashamed of any hardships we suffer which may be part of faithful service.

Paul recognises that Timothy is feeling fearful of what he has to do, a fear that sometimes frightens him (have we not had that tightening in the stomach when facing something new?)

The fear Timothy feels is not from the Lord, so Timothy is to take heart and protect the teaching Paul has given him with his 'guard dog' of faith and love, AND with help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within him.

There comes a time to all of us as we face difficulties or certain responsibilities when like H. we cry out for help. We too

may need to wait for the help of the Holy Spirit to fan our faith while waiting for the answer.

Luke 17. v 5-10

Yet again in our gospel reading faith is a priority. Luke tells us – It is not just great faith we need, it is faith in a GREAT GOD. Also having the right attitude to Jesus is important. So often nowadays society leads us to believe that only results matter, whether that means winning a match, making a profit or even growing the church.

Most important in what we are doing is the clarity and direction on our own hearts; are we truly doing it for God, or for our own self importance?

So why the story of the household servants?

For household servants in the time of Jesus there were no “lunch breaks”, even after a hard day working in the hot sun they had to get a meal ready for their master, there was no quick fix like popping something in the microwave. Preparations might have included gathering wood for fuel to heat the oven, grind the corn, milk the goat, as well as cooking and serving. Then after all that, they were expected to say “we have only carried out our duty”

I think the point Jesus is making in this story is that God is never in our debt, we can never say to God “I have done all this for you, so you owe it to me to sort out my problem” Feelings like this show we are looking after our own ego, that would be serving God for ourselves NOT for love of him or his glory.

As true servants of Jesus, like the disciples, we must learn true humility.

Inappropriate attitudes can so easily develop as they did in the disciples, and when they did, Jesus challenged their attitudes.

We might be tempted to think that our service, commitment, sacrifice or loyalty deserve proper recognition, and of course it is nice to be thanked and it often helps to keep us going.

But if we think that is our right we have got it all wrong. If this could be a problem for the disciples how much more is it for us in the present day with our protected rights and positive rewards?

Faith is like a window through which we can see something , it does not matter if it is 6 inches or 6 feet high, what matters is what we see in it. Is it the God our faith is looking for?
All genuine service to God is done from love and gratitude for for what he has done for us through Jesus, not done to earn anything. We can never put God in debt. Our debt to him through Jesus on the cross os too large.

A story to finish with.....

One day God was talking with the angels about where to hide within creation, so human kind might not find God too easily, but might grow through their searching.

The first angel suggested the depth of the earth as a hiding place. “No” said God , they will soon learn to dig mines deep enough and find me too quickly”

Well, what about hiding on their moon the second angel suggested. “No said God again, They have already reached the moon with their technology, they will soon find me.

It was the third angel who hit on the great idea. “Why don't you hide yourself in their own hearts,” she suggested. “They will never think to look for God there “

So God did just that, and this is why it takes us so long to find God, step by step as we do our living. And that in turn makes us grow.

We might ask God today to draw us a little closer to the secret depths of our own heart, where the secret of the holy is hidden for us to discover.

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