

"Faith in All Times"

Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4; **2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10**

October 3, 2010

As I was doing some reading in relation to our scripture text for today I encountered a prayer that I would like to share with you. It said:

"God, who can move mountains, we come in awe for the creation that reveals you, for sisters and brothers around the world who show us your face, and for your Spirit at work among us. God, who can move hearts, bind us, your servants around the globe, together as we feast at your table today, and as we serve you always.

God, who can move the world, we pray for people of faith everywhere that our hearts would be united in you and our lives would show your blessings. Amen."

It is a beautiful prayer. And we love all of the beautiful, heartwarming, sentimental, touching moments of faith.

Someone shared with me an article that contained the story of a little boy that was standing outside of a store on a cold winters day. He was poorly dressed for the occasion and was noticed by a woman coming out of the store. She asked why he wasn't dressed more warmly on that cold day only to learn that his family was too poor to afford winter clothes. So she took him inside and bought him a coat, gloves and a warm head covering. Upon leaving the boy asked the woman, "Are you God's mother?" To which the woman replied with a smile, "No, I am just another child of God." The boy smiled and said, "Yah, I knew you had to be related somehow."

Oooh, it makes us feel all warm inside. It is what we want to hear in relationship to our faith. It is what we expect of 'God stuff'. And when the world around us reveals a darker side When everything isn't warm and wonderful When the birds don't sing and the world moves in awkward stops and starts Then we too easily turn away from our faith and from our God.

The Old Testament book of Habakkuk is a powerful call to faith in God in all of those times when everything is not warm and wonderful. In the opening lines of the text we hear: *"²O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? ³Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise."*

What do you do about faith and God when everything does not go the way you hope or imagine that things should go? When 9/11 comes and towers fall, when relationships are strained and people attack and hurt one another, when families are at each others throats and even the church does not live up to our expectations, when the rains do not come and

the crops do not grow or the rain refuses to stop and the crops sprout in the swaths in the fields, In those times, what do we do about our faith, our church, our God?

I have seen and felt the great sense of relief that has come with sunshine and the drier days of the past week as crops have been gathered in and some have come to the completion of the harvest and others are moving along nicely with more sunshine in the forecast. Suddenly, it feels as though we can again say, 'God is in His heaven and all is right with the world.' But what if the rain refused to stop falling? How would we feel about our God then?

In later verses of Habakkuk's writing there is this powerful thought: {Habakkuk 3:17-19a} ¹⁷ *Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exult in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ GOD, the Lord, is my strength;*

The scriptures today are an incredibly powerful call to faith in God at all times. Not just when things are warm and wonderful but precisely in those times when weakness and human failing and struggle reveal themselves. If we only believe in God and worship in those times when the wheat produces 60 bushels per acre or better and the sun is always shining, we really miss the point. And the point is quite simple - - trust God! Trust God and go on living the life you know that God wants you to live no matter what external forces press against you. Faith is for all time Good and bad. Rejoicing in God is not for the prosperous seasons alone It is in fact all the more appropriate in the seasons of struggle. It is in those times that we need all the more to put our trust in God because it is then that we come to know that we can not fix everything in our world on our own. The disciples come to Jesus with an interesting request. "Increase our faith!" Jesus has been talking to His disciples about living a life that is holy so that our words and actions do not cause someone else to stumble ... it is not easy. And just as difficult is the act of forgiveness. If another follower of Jesus sins against you ... even seven times in one day, can you forgive? It is not easy. Who would not join the disciples in asking for increased faith. But how much do we need? How much faith does it take to forgive? Doesn't it really take a bit of weakness to simply say that I can't do it on my own so I have to trust God and in trusting God we find great power!

I don't think that we really understand what Jesus says in response. We love the whole 'mustard seed' faith image. Somehow we think that is comforting to think that we only have to have a tiny speck of faith. But the problem is that if we do not move mountains or uproot trees ... or forgive 7 times in a day ... or we fail in some way and cause someone else to stumble clearly we have to believe that we must not even have a tiny mustard seed faith. We misunderstand when we think that way because it really becomes a question of having enough faith in ourselves. But faith does not mean that we have strength but that we acknowledge that there is one who does have the strength. Faith is trusting in God ... not ourselves. The call is to have faith in the who has the power to create the universe and doesn't even have to break a sweat to move a mountain or a tree. Either we trust God or we do not. We trust ... we believe ... we have faith but God moves the mountain.

I have found myself feeling a bit frustrated and even a little angry in recent weeks as I have encountered letters to the editor in the Bottineau Courant that have been critical of the ELCA. It is hard to face criticism and disapproval. And certainly I am aware that we hold to many differing ways of understanding the actions and policies of the church. And I know that I could spend a great deal of time defending the ELCA or being critical of those who criticize. And if you have questions or comments about either I would love to discuss the concerns of either letter with you. But I mention those letters now by way of saying that life is filled with all kinds of interesting and difficult moments. And in those moments it would be easy to react badly. But then I heard the word of God that says; "Trust God!" "The righteous live by faith!" "Guard the good treasure that has been entrusted to you!" "We are servants of God ... simply do what we ought to do." We are so blessed to have a great God of love. And no matter what swirls around us in this warm and wonderful, crazy and confusing world - that fact will never change. Trust God!

AMEN