

Lamentations 1:1-6

Lamentations 3:19-26 *or* Psalm 137

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Luke 17:5-10

Today we say goodbye to the rotating homeless shelter that stayed in our church for this week. We had 32 wonderful human beings, who for a week were able to find some rest, eat some meals, receive some refreshment in our church while they attempted to try to find a home.

We had over 150 volunteers helping us throughout the week. They sacrificed time, money – and those who had to stay overnight – sleep. So they made sure that our guests felt comfortable. And so after a full week of doing this herculean act turning classrooms, and choir rooms, and parlors in St. Dunstan’s Chapel into bedrooms, and places to rest, and places to stay, and after having breakfast, lunch, and dinner for seven days every day, and after getting them to and from school and work, you would think that we would have such a sense of accomplishment!

And there was. The guests who were simply amazing, resilient, courageous, strong in their hope and trust that good was going to happen to them, they loved living in your church. They had such a great time. And I had one person come up to me and say, “It felt like home and like I was being hugged every time I walked in here.”

But one of our stalwart volunteers who worked everyday said to me, “You know, as hard as we’re working, and as much as we’re giving, it will never be enough. There’s still going to be difficulty, poverty, and trouble. And even as our guests leave from this place refreshed, they still leave without a dresser drawer to put their stuff in. What have we really accomplished? We cannot fix this.”

And then she said, “That’s why I have faith.” Because in the end she knew that caring for this world and making sure everyone has enough to live and thrive on is not just our job; that God is actually tirelessly working to bring about justice and peace for the whole world.”

So faith is believing that God acts even when we don’t. Faith is trusting that God will make a way when our ways fall short. Faith requires us to believe that things are going to turn out well even though we have evidence to the contrary. And faith is knowing in your bones that God will intervene, and God will fix our problems even though they are our fault in the first place.

So I don’t know about you but that’s a pretty demanding faith to have. It requires a lot of us, so maybe you and I can understand why the disciples said to Jesus, “Increase our faith.” And you would hope that the Savior and our friend would say back to us, “Oh my gosh, little ones, I’m so excited that you asked me that. You could have asked for fame, fortune, and wealth, and power. But no, you asked for faith. And your Heavenly Father, who loves

you so much, and cares for you greatly will grant you faith so that you too may have the fullness of the kingdom of Heaven and provide that which is good for everyone.”

Now that would be a very nice response by Jesus, wouldn't it? But of course, that's not what Jesus says. In a very savior-like way, Jesus rebukes them, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could throw trees into the sea, you could move mountains, you could accomplish anything.”

I admit that I am perplexed sometimes about the role of faith in my life partly because most of my Christian life is spent doing things with my faith and because of my faith. As well as getting you to do things because of your faith – so our faith leads to action. We believe in God and so that's why we hosted a shelter here, and we wanted to help people. We trust that God has given us all good things, so therefore we are very generous with our tithes, and our offerings. We know that God loves us, and so we love our neighbors as ourselves.

And in the book of James there's this profound verse about faith; “Faith without works is dead.” So signs of a living, active, mighty, vibrant faith are visible, outward actions that lead to accomplishments and fruits. And yet the more and more time that I spend doing acts of generosity and kindness for others, the more I serve, the more I pray, the more that I sacrifice, I realize that the substance of my faith isn't found in those things. My faith is found in places where there's least likely to be a change, where there's deep sickness, death, despair, and hopelessness. This is where faith lives. Where do you find yourselves having faith? What hopeless space in your life begs for you to have this much faith?

I want to tell you about the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk was a prophet who lived in the 6th Century. And he lived in the country of Judah. Now, Judah was the kingdom that was given by God to the Israelites. So these were the people who were stuck in Egypt, they were enslaved, they cry out to God, “God, save us.”

God heard their cries and then through the Exodus they got out of slavery and went into the wilderness. And God was with them, and God cared for them, and God gave Moses the commandments, the laws so that they could live with one another and be joyful. And then God took them to the land of milk and honey, and taught them to live with one another, and gave them great leaders like King David and King Solomon. And so they had everything that they could ever want to have a righteous and wonderful life with one another, caring for each other, making sure all were living and thriving.

Except that wasn't the case when Habakkuk was alive. Habakkuk looked around and he noticed that nobody was living by the law of God. Instead, they were ignoring the law and using it for their own gain. They used the law which was meant to provide for all and basically twisted it to serve their own purposes.

Habakkuk was astounded. Perhaps first at the audacity of his fellow countrymen. But then he was stunned to find out that God actually kept letting it happen. So he asks in the book, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen? Or cry to you “Violence!”

and you will not save?” And he expected God to stop the insanity that was leading to violence and wickedness.

Instead, the righteous were being immobilized, and paralyzed, and nothing good was happening. So God actually answers Habakkuk. And what he says to Habakkuk is astonishing. He said, “You think times are bad now? You just wait because the Babylonians are coming. And they are bigger and badder than anything you’ve ever experienced. They are ruthless, and they’re going to gather you like fish caught on hooks, and they’re going to devour you.” In other words, things are bad and they’re going to get worse.

But Habakkuk isn’t satisfied with this response because he believes that God acts in this world. And so he waits to hear a better answer. And God provides it. God says, “The righteous will live by their faith.” In the midst of hopelessness and helplessness, when nothing is working, when the world around you seems dark and ominous, and scary, you hold on to your mustard-size seed of faith. It's all you need to get through this crazy.

And what does it mean to live by faith? I think it means that you expect God to do something, right? It means that you believe that God is actually going to right the wrongs even though it seems like God’s taking God's own sweet time. But to live by faith is also to have joy, and hope, and peace in God when things are not going well.

Habakkuk in the darkest of times said this: "Though the fig tree does not blossom, there's no fruit on the vines, the produce of olive trees fail, and there's no food in the fields, yet I will rejoice in the Lord."

As we bid farewell to our shelter guests, I had the privilege of speaking with one whose small-sized faith put a big smile on this face. And he had no idea when he's leaving today how things are going to work out for him. He has no prospects for a house. He doesn't have a car so it's hard to say yes to a job when he can't always go there. There's no public transportation available for him. He's been waiting for years to have some sort of stability in his life, to have a little space, a studio to call his own.

And I was listening to his story, and I felt utterly useless because I couldn't fix it. I couldn't do anything. I don’t know how to create jobs, or make public transportation happen here, or provide low-income housing for people in Oakland County. And I actually told him, “I’m sorry I feel utterly useless and stupid. I can’t do anything to fix this.”

And he looked at me and said, “I don’t want you to do anything. God’s going to do something. I just want you to trust in God with me and walk with me.” Now that’s faith. Amen.

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