

A Panorama People

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

As the election closes in on Tuesday and it is once again safe to turn on a television without being assaulted by an attack ad, I discovered one of those God moments. Several months ago when we began planning worship for these last days of Ordinary Times, I hadn't consciously intended to do a series on the Minor Prophets of the Bible, but that has been one of the serendipitous results. I find their voices speaking powerfully to the experience of our day. Last Sunday we read from the prophet Joel. Next Sunday our reading is from the prophet Haggai and today our reading is from the hard to pronounce prophet Habakkuk. **I wonder if he comes from the same part of the world as Cihacek?** These are the voices from the edge of our faith tradition – lesser known speakers, less influential in the power structure of their day – but people who learned to use their voices and their insight to speak to the concerns of their people.

Like Joel, we know very little about the prophet Habakkuk. It is believed he lived during the time of the Babylonia occupation of the Middle East – around 500 to 600 BCE. Unlike the reading from Joel last Sunday which spoke to people during a time of economic calamity, Habakkuk speaks to “the twin threats of internal unrest and external menace.” So during this time people were growing weary of the double problem of not getting along with each other and their Babylonian occupiers. It seemed like there was no end in sight for these who felt trapped by the circumstances of their lives and world. They were facing the hard questions of life – oddly the same questions I have heard time and time again expressed in hospital rooms, funeral home viewing rooms and in my office. “Why is God doing this to me? Where is God when I hurt? Why do I have to endure such awful things in life?”

There are two ways to hear these kinds of questions. The first way is to hear them as questions seeking a response of information – although having that information **rarely brings relief**. God isn't doing this to you. God is right here when you hurt. The heart of God is broken when our hearts are broken. Our moral character or worthiness aside, bad things

do happen in life. All of these are true but they don't always provide the answer to our cry.

The second way to hear these questions is simply as a prayer of agony. The psalmist was particularly adept at this kind of prayer – crying out at the injustice and pain in the world with brutal honesty and cathartic release. As we have seen, the prophetic writers also use this experience. The cry is simply the emotional release in response to traumatic events. It is a spiritual fricative. A fricative helps us release emotion and energy in a constructive manner rather than a destructive manner. There is a reason that many curse words begin or end with fricative sounds. Fricatives are produced when air is forced through a constricted space – the “f” “s” “sh” “ch”. When I was boy, my extended family didn't allow children to use bad words so my cousins and I invented our own fricative. It was “fisa”. We had no idea that the “f” and “s” sounds were essential to a good fricative, we just knew that it felt good to say it and we didn't get in trouble with our parents.

So Habakkuk expels his tirade of fricatives. Then he goes up to the ramparts to see if he can discern the presence of God from his panoramic perch. It is only after he goes up higher and looks with a longer view that he is able to discern the voice of God's presence and to climb out of the mire of his circumstances. After all the struggles, the word he is given is to wait for the fulfillment of the promise and live by faith.

This wasn't a way for the divine to simply placate an angry prophet and a disillusioned people. When we view all of life through the lens of faith, it broadens our focus to include more than the fricative moments. We talked last Sunday about how hope functions in this way. Hope is born of faith and gratitude. It is only possible to have eyes of hope when we chose faith and gratitude.

If you unfold a road map of Scotland and look over by Loch Lomond on the western side of the country, you'll find a spot on the map labeled “Rest and Be Thankful.” That isn't an instruction from the mapmaker. It's actually the name of a mountain pass, noted for its breathtaking view. The place got its name because, in the days before cars, you had to

hike through a long, uphill climb to get there. Once you topped the crest of the hill, you found yourself in a broad, level place, with a spectacular vista – made all the sweeter by the knowledge that the road was all downhill from there.

After all the struggle and anxiety and pain and worry and uncertainty that life will inevitably present us along our way, it is imperative that we find places along the way to simply rest and be thankful. This is not an “easy answer” to life’s difficult questions. You can only reach “Rest and Be Thankful” after you have climbed the mountain. You don’t get the experience of seeing the broad plain and the downhill finish until you clawed your way to the top of the hill. But imagine what the climb would be like if you knew before you started that you would reach “Rest and Be Thankful”. Imagine how different your experience of the difficulties of the climb, the frustrations of delays and the investment of time and energy would be if you knew that there is a resting place – a guaranteed resting place. Maybe this is your first time up the mountain, but as a fellow climber I can tell you that I have reached the top before and I know what it is like to reach “Rest and Be Thankful”. There may be times along the way when we need to remind each other that we can get there. The climb is not all there is to this journey we call life. It is not an end unto itself. It is simply a process of growth and along the way we get the chance to reach the panoramic vista called “Rest and Be Thankful.”

Habakkuk told his people, “wait for it, work for it – it will certainly come.” We will only believe that promise if we become panorama people.

Sources:

www.homileticonline.com The Panoramic Vision of God, October, 2010.

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/fricative>