

2024 SHORT TALK FOR ALL-AGE SERVICE, 14.4.24, HABAKKUK 1:1-11

LOOK, WATCH & BE AMAZED

I have to be honest. I'm not sure why God led me to preach on Habakkuk. Really LORD? You want me to preach on this ? Now LORD? More than ever we need to hear good news, don't we?. But there aint a lot of good news here, especially in the first chapter of this book.

But as baffling as it is, Habakkuk is a little gem. Amongst all the amazing books of the Bible it emits this kind of mysterious glow. It dramatically reminds us that God is so often counter-intuitive. As God says through the prophet Isaiah: 'My ways are not your ways. My ways are higher than your ways'.

We have certain expectations of God. That our heavenly Father should provide comfort & reassurance & send the help we need in a timely fashion. So we almost say: 'Here's your job description, God. Here's what I expect you to do for me God'. But given what we read here, we might be tempted to do an Alan Sugar with God. 'You're fired, God! This is not good enough!. You are not doing what we agreed on your job description... '.

Habakkuk's first complaint to God is that there is too much violence on the streets of his home town. What's God's response? 'You think what is happening now is bad... You aint seen nothing yet. Watch what is going to happen soon...'. God promises to raise up the Babylonian hordes. Much more violence is in prospect. It's a bit like God responding to our fears about recent floods by saying: now watch this tsunami.

Similar to what has happened between Israel & Gaza in our times. Israel's response to 100s of its citizens being killed & taken captive, has been to kill and take captive 1000s of their nearest neighbours. And yet in the history of Israel we see God apparently taking a similar approach - with his own people. Really hard for us to hear. Difficult to watch what's happening on our TVs. But equally, it's hard for us to tear our eyes away from our television screens.

This is God's shock-treatment therapy. Shocking us out of any complacency. Any sense that we might have thought we have a God-given right to security & happiness. I believe God is sending us this hard message, today - just as he said to Habakkuk: No matter how hard things are right now. No matter how more terrifying they will get. Despite the reality that you see, there is a deeper

reality: God is still God. The LORD of all creation, the LORD of all the nations will have the first & the last word. Despite all we might be going through, both personally & globally, God will not abandon his creation. God will not abandon his people.

Habakkuk writes that 'strife & conflict abound'. And we know exactly what he is talking about. Because that's our experience today too. But I'm reminded of three purple passages from the pen of St Paul:

'Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds'... (Romans 5:20). God has won the victory in Jesus. God's love will triumph over all. As Jesus told us: we can expect trouble & plenty of it in this world. But we can also, every day, celebrate the truth that Jesus has overcome the world. Alleluia !

Elsewhere, Paul writes of his own difficult experiences: 'We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed... We carry this treasure in jars of clay...' (2 Cor 4:8&9). Alleluia !

Finally, an even more familiar passage is this one from Romans 8: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble... or hardship... or persecution... or famine... or nakedness... or danger or guided ballistic missiles?... No... I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our LORD.' Alleluia !

Let me finish with a good news story. It's a story of someone locally, affected by the PO scandal. This is John Hanna, postmaster in the village of Studham. He was forced to close the only shop in the village due to the losses he was running up, thanks to the systematic failings of the Horizon software. He received hate mail & had his shop windows smashed by people who felt let down by him. But people in the village have rallied round. Almost miraculously he has been able to stay in the village & is now able, once again, to walk round his village, greeting people. With God's help, we too can show similar strength & determination. Be sure of this: God's mercy is new every morning. Jesus greets us every day - with the warm wonder of his searching & all-conquering love.