

Sermon – Proper 26C

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4.

God's answer to my troubles!!

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" was the cry of Jesus on the cross. There he takes up the cry of the Psalmist in the OT who also cries out to God; "My God, My God why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent."

And this has been the cry of many a God-fearing person throughout the ages. 'God why? - Why these troubles? – Why do you allow hardships to overpower us? God why don't you answer us when we call for help?

In light of the Old Testament lesson from Habakkuk, I take up this thought this morning; where is God's answer to our troubles. First, let us hear again the cry of Habakkuk. "How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds."

As we listen to that, we too, hear that as our own cry, at various points through our lives. We also know what it is to be burdened down by trouble or some tragedy and despite our pleas to God, there seems to be no ready answer. We are weighed down by guilt - we cry out - but no relief. Some disastrous tragedy strikes our family and God seems so distant and uncaring. We face huge financial pressures and it appears as though God is not providing any way out. Evil abounds in our society around us - attacking from all directions; and instead of any improvements - things go from bad to worse. The churches have lost their way and their focus, and it only seems to be getting worse.

We cry out to God but receive no relief. Guilt wells up inside: the pressures keep coming, evil continues to hammer away at us. Is there no hope? Is there no way out? Has God deserted us; leaving us to fight our own battles? Is he so distant and uncaring? Often that seems to be the case.

Habakkuk along with many others in Scripture had similar concerns and thoughts. But like Habakkuk, we need to listen to God's reply. In response, the Lord say; 'Wait - wait for the Lord and he shall bring to pass all that he promises.' So despite what Habakkuk was experiencing, he was told to wait. Don't feel sorry for yourself. Trust God and wait; your enemies will receive what is coming to them. Yes, it might seem as though it is a long time coming - but it surely will come. You will receive all that God has promised.

So, when we are burdened down by our troubles or some tragedy; crying to God for an answer - for help, we are asked not to go on feeling sorry for ourselves; but to wait for the Lord. We are to hang in there despite what is happening. God will come to our rescue when the time is right. So no matter how tough things might be - we need hang in there and wait.

Yes sure; I can hear you say. That opens us up to the accusation that we are fools. We are to trust God to help us and nothing happens, so we are seen to be crazy by many around us. 'But look at them,' God says. Look at them, as proud and arrogant as they are on the outside - within they are deeply troubled. Their spirit is not at ease either - they do not have the answers. They in fact are the ones who are living in a make believe world. They are the real fools. No - the Lord says - you live by faith irrespective of what others are saying. Wait for God's answer. Trust that he will help you when the time is right. He has promised to do what is best for you and for his kingdom and he does not renege on his promises. So wait.

What then, is it that he has promised us? From the time of the Fall of Adam God has promised he will come to the help of his people in their need. He said he would send a saviour, even though we will have to suffer the results of sin along the way. Throughout the Bible, we have recorded for us the promises of God and of how time and again he did come to the aid of his people; even if they had to wait awhile. And of course, the greatest of those promises is that of his coming to rescue us all from our most serious problem of all - that of sin and alienation from God, which results from our rebellion. The promise that his own Son would come and take the punishment that we deserve, for our disobedience and failure to live as God would have us.

So as a result of Jesus' life, death and resurrection we are assured that God is now with us and for us, throughout life. At our baptism God promised to be with us personally throughout this life - even in our hardships; and that we are a part his family here and in eternity, no matter what. And when we come to the Lord's Table we are assured in a very special way of the Lord's forgiveness, presence and help. Then through the blessing pronounced there, his presence will strengthen and preserve our body and spirit throughout. Even in our troubles, he will be strengthening and keeping us in the true faith. When a fellow Christians visits, there the body of Christ is present and active also; and that help we receive from them, is help from God Almighty himself.

But too often, of course, we view what I just said as mere words and promises of what might be. Can we really wait for God's help when we are in real trouble simply on those promises - on these words? Yes, we can. We can hang in there because God is faithful to his people. He has always been true to his promises in the past. In the Bible, there are many, many accounts of God doing just that: fulfilling his promises despite the unfaithfulness, unworthiness and stupidity of the people involved. That is nowhere, more fully demonstrated, than in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There we have God's assurance that he does love us and care us in our mess, even though we are not the people that we should be. There on the cross we can know for sure that he is for us. That cross is his guarantee to you and me.

Even in our own lives, we can see how many times God has helped us and blessed us. As we look back to our past difficult times, we see how he has rescued, cared and strengthened us. Even though at the time, we could not see it: even though we might have gotten ourselves into the mess we were in, he was there, showing his care and suffering with us.

So we can again trust God in the future, in the midst of the troubles and hardships that we will face. We can be sure that he will not leave us fight our own battles; to struggle on in own mess; and to slowly go down the tube and be totally broken by what is happening. We can be sure he once again will be with us helping and encouraging us, despite what might look to be the contrary. He will use that situation for good: either, our own good, or for the good of others.

However, there are times when he says, wait. There are times when the answer he gives doesn't always come just the way we think that it should, or when we think it should come. But it comes. He knows best. He knows what is of real benefit to us and to his kingdom in the longer term. So often, he simply says, wait - wait till his time is right. We will receive help and even greater blessings than we can ever imagine. He simply says trust him - he will take care of the situations; he will bring justice and blessing.

So to conclude, there we have God's answer to us in our problems. Often when we cry out for help his answer is wait. Wait because God has promised that he will come to our aid. Wait because God is faithful to his people. Wait because he has helped and blessed us richly through Jesus' death on the cross. Wait and trust that he will do what is necessary and what is best. And through it all continue to look to Jesus Christ and his death on the cross and know that he is true to his word.

No matter what, look to our gracious and almighty God to give you the patience and strength to endure those times of hardship when they come our way, to help you to wait and never lose sight of his love and faithfulness as shown to us by Jesus on the cross. There, remember that you are already richly blessed now and forever. Also, there remember that all glory and honour will ultimately go to our great God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For he alone is our help and our salvation.

AMEN.