

August 2, 2009

# God is Working

HABAKKUK 3:1-15  
COMMUNION SUNDAY

Rev. Darryl C. Evans

We have been soaking in this ongoing dialogue between Habakkuk and God, and the more we read it, the more we can sense the deep bond that they have. This Book is short, but it is rich, just as any life is when it is bound to God.

And today we come to a new turn in this drama. Today things change. Even though we have sat with all these questions about unwanted change – questions like why the evil prosper when God is in control – or what to do when we feel stuck in life – today all those questions are suddenly stilled and Habakkuk’s troubles subside while he is in God’s presence in worship. This is still what worship does to us.

And as we enter Habakkuk’s song, the tone of his life changes. He is not crying out as before, “Why is this happening?” and this is not a “me” focused prayer. He is not saying, “Bless me! Bless the work of my hands, and take away my troubles.” No, instead this song begins, “Lord, I stand in awe of *Your* work. Renew them – renew them in our day; in our time make it known.” As Elizabeth Achtemeier says, this reminds us of the Lord’s Prayer. Because Habakkuk considers what God has done, and he wants God to do it again. You can just hear the echo behind it: Perform your great deeds again! Do you glorious and awesome work again! Renew things to how they should be. May, “Thy kingdom come... thy will be done... do it again, O Lord.”

And just like the Lord’s Prayer, Habakkuk’s song does two things. First, it points us to *who God is*. God is a Life-giving God, just as we learned last week that we don’t receive Life by what we do, but by the promise of God. And since God’s promises are life-giving, Habakkuk looks back to the past on those *promises in action* to see what God has done in the past and to be encouraged. He is looking back on the Covenant.

That’s why the first part of this song reminds us where we came from. The unfamiliar places in the phrase, “God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran” is evoking the image that God is coming from the area of Mount Sinai where Moses received the 10 Commandments. Geographically, it is pointing us to the desert wilderness in the south, which is right where the Israelites came up from the desert when God led forth out of bondage in Egypt and into the Promised Land. In other words, we are remembering the past victories of God – past victories that were rooted in God’s Promises.

That is why when we are feeling stuck in life – and our energy and patience has been stretched thin – that we look back at what God has done in our lives. Perhaps you remember a time that you simply knew God was there, even if you can’t explain it. Or perhaps you have felt God’s presence all around you. We look at both the past and the ongoing victories that God has had throughout the history of the community of faith and in our very own lives. We know that just as God delivered His people in the times of Moses, so too God is watching over us.

Our questions of why life is so hard – of why the world can look so dark – why those Babylonians are coming – make no sense to us. Those times that we just cannot make sense of life are not what we expected; but then again neither is our God. He is not what we expected; He is so much greater.

God is so great and powerful that Habakkuk likens God to a cosmic thunderstorm when he writes how God's glory covers the heaven; how brightness like the sun comes forth from God – how rays come from his hand even though God is hidden. You can feel the whole Creation bow to God, just as we read, “God stood, and shook the earth.” God is so great that nothing can stop His majesty. Even the stars and planets in their orbits – their “ancient pathways” – move aside. The eternal mountains shatter in the presence of the Almighty. How can we think of something more awesome than these kinds of images as we ponder who God is?

No Habakkuk's circumstances in life were not what he expected – but then again, neither is his God. And when we have just a small peak at God through this vision in Habakkuk we are so overwhelmed by the majesty of God that our questions fade away without us even realizing it.

...This is the Great One is the same God who has made us promises. This is the God who we then learn a second thing about – for in the second part of this song we learn that this is the God *who fights for us*. This God who is so great that words fail to describe him – this God who shakes the earth – the King of the Universe is now fighting for you! He is working on your behalf! He is victorious in battle over our enemies. God comes out to deliver His people (3:13), and we are again reminded of God's deeds – even as Habakkuk asks God to renew them again – just as He promised in the covenant.

The first of these images consists of the waters and the sea, which are often associated in the Bible with primeval chaos and darkness. But here God pushes aside the chaotic waters and God splits the rivers, just as He conquered the chaos at the very beginning of Creation, just as God was at work on the Third Day when He separated the seas from the dry land. And put things in order and gave life. God worked at Creation (Genesis 1:9-14).

Or as we saw God coming from Teman and Mount Paran, so we are reminded through geography of the splitting of the Red Sea and of victory over Pharaoh and release from the bondage of slaves. We remember God's great work at the Exodus (Exodus 14).

We could go on remembering God's faithfulness and triumph over evil. Even as we encounter the image of the “Sun giving up and the Moon stands still” – just as it did in the Book of Joshua (Joshua 10:12-14) when God gave Israel victory over their enemies by having the sun stop in the middle of the sky for a full day!

So many images. They are hard to see on a first reading, but they are so many memories of God's faithfulness. Each time, we remember that God is at work in all those images: Lord, remember what you did at the Beginning of Creation? Do it again. Lord, remember your victory at the Exodus. Do it again. Lord, remember how you lead us into the Promised Land under Joshua? Do it again. Each time, as we recall what God has done, we say, “do it again, Lord.” Perform your deeds again, work in us to rescue and renew us.

Yes, here we have only a glimpse into the majesty of God; a vision of that complete victory is yet to come. And all this is happening as the people are singing. This is all a song for public worship, just as at the beginning of the reading we had we were told to set this to music by the phrase “on the shigionoth.”

This worshipping people know that the righteous will live by faith, and now that we know that those connected to God shall live, what better things to dwell on than the past victories of this God that we are placing our faith in? What better place to be renewed than in worship?

Living in this in between times, living “in the meanwhile” is right where we all are. We acknowledge this once again as we come to the Lord's Table today. As we partake, we look back on God's past victories. We dwell again upon on Jesus' death on the cross. We dwell again on the fact that God raised Him from the dead. We know that through all of this, death

itself is destroyed, and that because of Jesus' Resurrection we have new life. As we come to this Table, we are reminded what God has done and who He is. And as we do these things we look forward to that Day when Christ will come again. We are standing on God's promises. We are living by faith, just as Habakkuk did.

Yes, we believe that God is majestic beyond our imaginations. Yes, we trust God and the promises He has made. Yes, we know God will one day have total victory over all – even though today we don't always see it. Even though today there is evil in the world. Even though we are living in between the times of Jesus' Birth and Jesus coming again – we too, like Habakkuk, are living in the meanwhile. That is why we say that in this Sacrament we have a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. As we partake, we look forward to future renewal, even as we are renewed this very day by receiving grace.

This is living "in the meanwhile." This is living by faith. This is what coming to this Table is all about. The key to this Sacrament is the same key we have been focusing on with this relationship between Habakkuk and God. It is the same key to having life through the Promises of God. The key is this: *Union with Christ*. And that is exactly where we want to be during the hard times of life and when we have unwanted change.

God wants us to find life in Him. God wants to renew us. He will renew us with that Resurrection Life being poured out into our souls in good times and in bad. And just as Habakkuk is singing God's praises with this song that is Chapter 3 of Habakkuk, so too we are reminded that God renews us in worship. We can worship God in all kinds of ways, but especially when life is hard this shows us why it is so important to worship together in a *community* of faith. Even by doing something as simple as looking at one another we are reminded that we are not alone. We are a people that God has called.

And this Great God – that the whole creation bows to – is advancing against our enemies, and one day there will be a total victory. It is a great comfort even if we know that we will not see the fullness of that victory today.

Today, like Habakkuk, we remember who God is, and what He has done. We remembered how God worked at the Creation, how God worked at the Exodus, how God worked in the Promised Land, how God worked in Habakkuk's time, and how He is working in our day. Despite our present circumstances, God is working. God is working to renew us. Amen.

### First Presbyterian Church

211 W. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street / Washington, NC 27889 / 252-946-4616

[www.fpcwashington.org](http://www.fpcwashington.org)

Summer Service at 10am