

Proper 22 C 2019

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

Psalm 137:1-6

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Luke 17:5-10

At the heart of all things
There is an unquenchable source,
A wellspring of abundant life,
Of beauty, of truth,
Of good without measure,
Unfailing love.

A boundless goodness
That hides everywhere,
Waiting to be found,
Hoping to be embraced,
Glowing like an ember
Until at last it flowers forth
And bears fruit in the fulfillment of all hopes:
The commonwealth of love and justice.
The healing of all harms,
The reconciliation of all things.

If you believe this,
And for some among us,
At least some of the time,
It's uncertain at best,
But if you do believe this,
Or you might say –
On the days when you do believe it –
Then you can trust the words of the prophet.

There is still a vision.
There is still a promise.

If it seems slow,
Wait for it.
It will surely come.

These are hard days to believe it.
You could be forgiven for imagining
That the prophet was speaking of a time just like this
In saying:

Strife and contention arise.
So the law becomes slack
And justice never prevails.
Judgment comes forth perverted.

But the prophet,
Who speaks for God to us,
And for us to God,
Keeps the long view,
Standing on the ramparts
Looking beyond the horizon
To the vision
That is true,
But beyond our sight.

If it seem slow, wait for it.
It will surely come.

This is the task of faith.
To wait,
Trusting that the vision will come to life.
To hope,
When hope seems irrational.
The task of faith
Is to stay alive like a tiny seed,
until it can grow
and do amazing things.

Does faith have a size?
Does it matter if it is small as a seed?

Certainly we think of it as a thing that comes in sizes;
We speak of it as great,
Or little,
Of it growing.
And we speak of it as a thing we can lose.

We who are counters,
Adders and subtractors
Cannot help but assume that faith
Is something that can be measured –
And to leap from there to the assumption
That the bigger it is,
The better it is.
From there,
It's an easy leap, for many,

Into feeling guilty
About having a faith
That doesn't measure up.

Certainly the disciples
Were just like us in this.
They thought that faith
Came in sizes,
And they wanted more, bigger, better.

But Jesus, who is just like us,
Is one of us –
Is not like us in this.
Jesus does not answer the plea of the disciples,
That he help them find more of what they know they need.
Without more faith,
How can they be faithful
To the awesome and wonderful way he leads them,
A way of love that turns the world upside down
and inside out?

Increase our faith!
Their plea is earnest,
Demanding.
When we want to be different from them,
We see it, perhaps,
As dumb and inappropriate.
When we see ourselves,
Not too comfortably,
In their company,
We feel their feelings
And want what they want.
More of what we think will make up the difference –
Make it easy or possible
To follow in the way –
The way of listening, letting go,
Reconciling, healing, renewing.
How can we do that,
Without more faith?
Increase our faith,
We plead,
As the disciples plead.

But remember –
Jesus seldom, if ever,
Answers their questions, or ours,

The way we would want.
He doesn't answer questions the way we want,
Or the way we answer.

When people come to us,
Asking how to increase their faith,
We, rightly and appropriately,
Give questions and answers that offer help and guidance.
What are the spiritual practices
That increase compassion?
Who are the companions
Who will support us and hold us accountable?
Where is the community
That will comfort and inspire us?

These are good questions, good answers,
Right and true.
They are our answers,
And they satisfy us.
They are enough;
they make a difference,
And they reassure us.
They keep us in the realm
Where we feel comfortable –
The world of counting,
Measuring,
Keeping time.
A world where even faith is a thing that can be measured,
And increased.

For Jesus,
Faith is not a thing
That can be counted and measured.
It does not have a size.
It is not a thing.

He tries to tell them that,
And we still can't hear him.
Faith does not have a size.
If it did,
The tiniest amount
Would make giant trees
Fly through the air
And take root in the sea.

When we hear this,

We're supposed to have our minds blown,
And then either laugh,
Or cry,
Or stand in silent wonder
For a moment that can't be measured in time.
Jesus, the master storyteller and trickster,
Is trying to blow holes in our careful constructions.
What we usually do instead
Is to take him literally,
And then feel guilty
That no trees are flying into the sea.
No mountains are moving.
There must be something wrong with our faith.

But here's the thing:
Jesus is not asking us to measure faith.
Any more than he is asking us
To wallow in shame about the size of our faith
Or guilt about our inability to increase it.

Here, I believe,
Is what he is doing.
Jesus is inviting us to walk straight out of our world
Of counting and measuring
And into a world of vision.
A world where limits disappear
And promises are fulfilled.

There are no numbers in God's economy.
There is only abundance.
Remember he tells a story where
Everyone gets the same generous wages
No matter how long they work.
We question it every time,
And say it's not fair,
And every time,
God comes back with more.
God is beyond measure
And the mercy of God is measureless.

If there are no numbers in God's economy,
Then can faith have a size?

Jesus seems to say no.
There is only faith.

We live in the world of counting,
Of adding and subtracting,
Of evidence and obfuscation
whistle blowing
and the lie that the news is fake,
And exhausting uncertainty.
So to us
There is a big difference between the size of a mustard seed,
A speck,
And the girth of a tree
Or the vastness of the sea.
But faith,
A measureless gift,
Tips us into a whole new world,
The world of promise,
Of hope,
Of vision.

Keeping the vision,
Keeping hope alive
Is the work
Of the people of faith.

Sometimes it looks as crazy
As a gigantic tree
Flying thought the air
And planting itself in the sea.

But the vision is true.
There is enough.
There is more than enough for everyone,
And still plenty to spare.

The vision is true
That there can be a safe secure dwelling for everyone.
The vision is true
That justice can prevail,
That no child need be hungry,
That every woman can be free,
That every man can be safe,
That every human being –
Trans, non-binary, atypical,
Differently abled –
Can be loved and respected
As fully human, fully accepted,
Belonging and beloved.

The vision is true
That the earth can heal and renew itself.
It is even true
That America the beautiful
Can still be a land of promise,
Free of vicious injustice,
Free from anger and fear.

This is a moment when we can choose
To be people of faith.
This moment when we look into the abyss,
Where mistrust and miscarriage of justice
And the breakdown of common life are lurking,
Is the moment for us to show
Our measureless faith.

People of faith are vision keepers.
They do not forget hope
When the future seems dark.

They see beyond the counting and measuring
That mark our lives
And believe in a good future.

People of faith
Believe in God's future.

If that future seem slow,
Says the prophet,
Wait for it.
It will surely come.

It is not for us
To measure our faith.
That only leads to guilt and silence
And inaction.

Jesus invites us
To stop counting,
To stop measuring,
And to step out.
Trust the vision.
Write it in big letters,
So that as the prophet says, a runner could read it.

Believe in God's vision. A world renewed.