

# *The Vision Awaits Its Time*

## **Habakkuk 2:1-5**

Text: *Write the vision; make it plain . . .* Habakkuk 2:2

### **Introduction**

Two weeks ago, while on study leave at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, I visited my sister Harriette and brother-in-law Philip, who live an hour west of Rochester, New York. Philip had just turned eighty-three and remembers well having grown up in a fundamentalist Baptist family under the tutelage of a strict father who served as an ultraconservative Baptist minister until the day he died in his ripe old age. Years ago Philip told me that late in his father's life, his father was extremely fond of *Heluva Good* cheese, which he used to pronounce *Ha-luÚ-a Good* cheese. When Philip finally informed his father that the brand name of the cheese is pronounced *Hell-of-a Good* cheese, his father blatantly refused to believe him . . . until Philip showed him the spelling. From that day on, his father never again touched his lips to a slice of *Heluva Good* cheese.

In about 600 B.C., the Prophet Habakkuk was proclaiming God's word during a *Ha-luÚ-a* bad time in a *Ha-luÚ-a* troubling state under the *Ha-luÚ-a* oppressive conditions of Babylonian power and ruthless dominance. At the very outset of his prophecy, Habakkuk is complaining about the seeming indifference of an all-powerful God:

*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,  
and thou wilt not hear?  
Or cry to thee "Violence!"  
and thou wilt not save?  
Why dost thou make me see wrongs  
and look upon trouble?  
Destruction and violence are before me;  
strife and contention arise.  
So the Law is slacked  
and justice never goes forth.  
For the wicked surround the righteous,  
so justice goes forth perverted.<sup>i</sup>*

Here Habakkuk is confronting honestly and passionately the issue of theodicy, that is, how one justifies the ways of a just God in an unjust world. On behalf of the people of Israel, the prophet addresses the profoundly disturbing question of why a just God is "silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they."<sup>ii</sup> Habakkuk has found himself directly between a God who is righteous and a world where crises abound. Having complained vociferously to God, Habakkuk mounts the tower to watch and wait for God's answer to his complaint. The answer? *Write the vision, make it plain . . . for the vision awaits its time.*

## **In Every Life a Crisis**

For a moment this morning, let us place ourselves among the people of Israel in 600 B.C. Projecting ourselves into their milieu, we can surely identify with each individual. The people to whom the prophet is speaking are those who are trapped between dreams of life fulfillment, on the one hand and the reality of life stifled by external forces on the other. Each mother, father, child, grandparent longs for a high quality of life, yearning for days of uninterrupted joy, decades of peace and prosperity, lasting moments of achievement and recognition, perpetual family bliss and security. Yet every day each of them is confronted by crises . . . perhaps life-threatening crises at the hands of the greedy, merciless Assyrians. Every day each of them tastes the human dilemma.

The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, author of the literary *tour de force* titled *War and Peace*, was a nobleman who put his faith into action, serving day after day in soup lines in St. Petersburg among the starving peasantry. He was one who was profoundly aware of the human dilemma, the tragic twists of fate that leave the individual few choices in a society riddled by perpetual crises, both individual and communal. Life is like this, said Tolstoy: A man was walking along a path on his way to a much-anticipated engagement when he was immediately confronted by a fierce monster. To escape a tragic end at the hands of this monstrous fiend, the man jumps into a well close at hand and, to avoid plummeting to his death, he grabbed a sturdy branch that was growing out of the wall of the well. He no sooner caught the branch and his breath when he espied a black rat coming from his left and a white rat approaching from his right, both of which were heading toward the branch to gnaw it through where it grew from the wall. All that was left for him to do was to lick the honey that was dripping from the only leaf on the branch.<sup>iii</sup>

For Tolstoy this rather bleak picture served as an allegory for the human predicament, the quandary that confronts all of us at various times in our lives as we ride the tempests and vicissitudes of life from the heights of ecstasy to the depths of despair and back to ecstatic heights again. In this undulating quality of life, one reality is indisputable: at some point along the spectrum of every life, there is a crisis. . . . if not today, then tomorrow; if not tomorrow, then sometime soon, and if not soon, sometime before we close our eyes in our final sleep.

Tolstoy's story is only an allegory, yet surely each person in Habakkuk's time—as well as each of us in our day—can identify with its imagery, for each of us has been caught between our dreams and our disappointments, between our visions of hope and our moments of despair.

Identify also, if you will, with the whole people of God in Habakkuk's seventh century B.C., for what I want to address more than the crises in our individual lives is the predicament inherent in our life together as the Church, the Body of Christ in this place. If it is true that in every individual life there is a crisis, it follows that in every corporate life there is a time of crisis as well, if not now, then in a time gone by or in a time to come. Nearly a decade ago, Wayne Yost, Presbytery Executive of the Kiskiminetis

Presbytery told me that at some point every church, without exception, goes through crisis. . . . usually internal conflict of one degree of severity or another.

Bower Hill Community Church has had its challenges as well. And *today*—out of the Refiner's Fire and the Crucible of Challenge—emerges the pure gold.

### **In Every Crisis a Kairos**

There are a number of Greek terms for the word *time*. There is *chronos*, which means chronological time, the time that appears on the face of the clock. Minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, month after month, year after year, *chronos* unfolds in a systematic progression. The other Greek word that is important to us in our context this morning is *kairos*, which is the fullness of time, the appointed time, God's opportune moment, or, shall we say, the moment of God's opportunity. *Kairos* is God's timing in history, God's timing in your life and in mine. While in every life there is a crisis, I believe in every crisis there is a *kairos*: God working in us in his good time, using his timing to bring us newness of life, the moment when the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, when God intervenes to influence our own personal histories as individuals and as his Chosen Ones, the moment when God brings meaning and perspective to the crises in our lives, the opportune moment when God makes us aware that his purposes are much larger than our perceptions, the opportune time when the *Eternal Yes* issues from our lips as we finally understand God's meaning in our pain, God's purpose in our sorrow, God's direction in our disease, God's tenderness in our tragedy, God's hand in our destiny as his people.

You are the people of God in this place, and here at Bower Hill Community Church, the *kairos* is now! God's moment of opportunity is now! God's fullness of time is now! Now! Now! Now! This is the *kairos*! *When the Lord restores the fortune of his people, we become once again like those who dream.*<sup>iv</sup> The Lord's appointed servant will arrive in this very spot on August 1—the *kairos* is now! You the people will gather to hear the Word of God proclaimed with a new and fresh passion—the *kairos* is now! You and Brian Snyder will write God's vision on the tablet plainly so that all who read it may run to proclaim it—the *kairos* is now! The vision awaits its time—and the time is now!

### **Conclusion**

Here at this opportune moment, here in this passage, Habakkuk proclaims the word of life to the church—to *this* church: Write the vision, make it plain; claim the *kairos*; live by your faithfulness.

Now. Now. Now

*We hear beyond the range of sound,  
We see beyond the range of sight,  
New earths and skies and seas abound,  
And in our day the sun doth pale (in) its light.*<sup>v</sup>

*For the Lord has restored the fortunes of his people, and we are like those who dream.*

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**May 16, 2010**

## *Notes*

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<sup>i</sup> Habakkuk 1:2-4

<sup>ii</sup> Habakkuk 1:13

<sup>iii</sup> Adapted from Leo Tolstoy's *Confessions*

<sup>iv</sup> Psalm 126:1

<sup>v</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Inspiration Proem*, Stanza 7