

Sometimes I just shake my head at what I read and see in the news or at the stories I hear from my neighbors or even at the things that happen to my own family. In our modern world, we hear of violent criminals who injure or kill innocent people and often escape justice. We read of terrorists who recruit children as suicide bombers. We read of babies dying because their mothers took drugs or because they were born in refugee camps with poor shelter. We hear of older people losing their savings in fraud. Or we see examples of good people losing their jobs while greedy ones are promoted. We hear often about violent skirmishes between police and minorities. We see cheaters win and the honest people lose. In watching the news and in living every day, we see examples where sin or violence (which often also stems from sin) seems to be winning and the righteous of God seem to be losing.

Yet we are a people of faith. How do we reconcile that faith with what we see? Where in the world is God and how long will he let evil triumph while the righteous often suffer?

Habakkuk faced the same challenge in his day – way back in the 7th century BCE. He saw that violence and greed prevailed and the righteous were unable, on their own, to reform society. Everything was amiss according to the covenant that God had ordained with God's people.

Habakkuk, a contemporary of Jeremiah's, is a different sort of prophet from most of his colleagues in the Old Testament. Most prophets, such as Jeremiah and Isaiah, delivered God's message to the people. But Habakkuk is delivering the people's message – or rather the people's cry -- to God. Their cry to God wasn't very different than what we might cry today.

The answer for us is the same as well. We stand watch like a sentry; we pray and we listen to see what God will say. We are

patient. We still our hearts from distraction of anything besides God. We ask God to open our hearts and eyes. Then we look again and we seek where God *is* at work in the world. We see healing for some who have suffered from addictions to drugs and healing for their families. We see examples of the generosity of others to help those who have lost their jobs or their savings. We see lives transformed through the kindness of strangers. We see our own ability to cope with the bad things of this world change. We sense our own call to do what we can do in the world, even if it affects only a small change. We see grace.

Rabbi Harold S Kushner, who wrote the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, says “God is the light shining in the midst of darkness, not to deny that there is darkness in the world but to reassure us that we do not have to be afraid of the darkness because darkness will always yield to light. As theologian David Griffin puts in, God is all powerful, His power enables people to deal with events beyond their control and He gives strength to do those things because He is with us.”

We also know that what we see now in the physical world is only temporary. Yet even in its temporary state, we still see God the Holy Spirit at work. We still see grace. We still see times when the Holy Spirit working through people cannot let evil have the last word.

We also know that because of Christ’s death on the cross, sin cannot destroy us – not our own sin and not anybody else’s sin. We know that God’s promise is that ultimately, in the eternal world, the one to which we all transition when we die and the one that ultimately will exist physically on earth at Jesus’ Second Coming, only good will exist. Evil will be totally banished. God will have the last word.

So what did God do to answer Habakkuk's prayer in that day. He sent an opposing army to defeat Habakkuk's society and to hold much of it in exile. Sounds pretty harsh, but out of that defeat and destruction came renewal. The new Judaen society that ultimately emerged was more righteous – it returned to the commandments of God.

If we read to the end of Habakkuk (a short book that I would encourage us to read when we get home) we see a transformation in the prophet's cry to God. "Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails; and the field yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will exalt in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer and makes me tread upon the heights."

God the Holy Spirit has filled Habakkuk throughout his prayer and he knows that God will bring healing and grace.

God does so for us as well. He brings grace. When bad things happen, we have the strength to bear them and we are assured of a future where only God and righteousness exist.

The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.

Amen