

## WAIT FOR IT

Four decades ago, Elton John set these words to music:

Torn from their families  
Mothers go hungry to feed their children  
But children go hungry  
There's so many big men...They're out making millions  
When poverty's profits  
Just blame the children  
If there's a God in heaven  
What's he waiting for  
If He can't hear the children  
Then he must see the war  
But it seems to me  
That he leads his lambs  
To the slaughter house  
And not the promised land...  
Dying for causes  
They don't understand  
/We've been taking their futures  
Right out of their hands  
They need the handouts  
To hold back the tears  
There's so many crying  
But so few that hear  
If there's a God in heaven  
Well, what's he waiting for

Have you asked John's question?  
People are not good with delay.  
Last year's miracles mean little during today's crisis.  
This message should come with a warning  
You do not want to hear this  
Or...maybe I should admit,  
I don't want to preach this message.  
Who accepts an assignment to preach an obscure text  
From an apocalyptic canon 7th centuries before Jesus taught us how to pray  
To be clear, I wasn't asked then to do this,  
maybe that much lead time would offer you a better message  
I am reflecting on words from then,  
the ancient wisdom  
preserved by a people who found in these words hope  
Like every preacher bringing forth the biblical text as Scripture  
I am challenged to handle  
with respect

the records of a people I do not know  
To allow this episode in their memory  
to bring to our recollection the promise and presence of the Creator God

For those who are prone to take the Bible more literally than seriously  
The texts of this often overlooked prophetic book  
can easily be dismissed as ancient history,  
the playground for some Hebrew bible scholar in search of  
an obscure textual criticism to obtain another academic credential...  
Or worst...

A metaphorical reading ...of these reports from  
the final decade of Israel's southern kingdom:

Constructive criticism of the failure  
of God's people ...to set the right standards  
for a society that does not know Israel's God;  
warnings of imminent end time destruction,  
whether by rapture or revolution.

As history repeats itself,  
one of the greatest cities in the world  
is about to be sacked by an allied army  
whose combined forces swoop onto the set  
like the choreographed scenes in the Avenger's Endgame.

And, just as in the movies' reflection of reality,  
a multiverse of alternative responses  
leave us intoxicated and distracted by the WHAT - IFs  
that take residence in our imaginations  
when we linger before the tree of knowledge to discern  
what is good and evil

because the creator of the universe seems to be holding back on us  
with empty promises and unrealized potential.

There seems little to invite us to linger in this prophet account  
(—Breathe—)

That 3 minute introduction  
is like a trailer for a soon-to-be-released-blockbuster  
which can be binge-watched at your convenience

So I encourage you to pay close attention to what the prophet Habakkuk is saying  
And pray with me as I share a few words with the thought:

### **God's Next Move**

The Lord be with you (and also with you)

Let us pray

Creator Covenanting God:

Whenever it seems you are silent,

we fill the room with our requests:

Needs and wants - to change the world.

Hopes and fears that *this too* must pass

...but

...then what?  
AMEN

The writer Habakkuk sees the rising threat on the horizon  
A people whose religious commitments mocked those of his community  
Governments whose policies and practices of imperial pacification conquer an entire  
people group,  
Deporting them in masse to the capital city like the victors in the Hunger Games,  
And, in THIS prophetic account, unlike others,  
we are privy to the conversations between Katniss and Peta  
rather than the fraught tutorial of Hamich.  
Or, to return to the Marvel Universe, this is not Nick Fury  
offering plans for the next attack,  
this is Natasha Romanoff asking  
What- if there ...just might be a future with Bruce Banner,  
a pleading reconsideration of the possibility of good  
when there is so much evil and tragedy in their world.  
As many are now recognizing, this is a lament.  
This is not criticism of Israel.  
This is not a warning of what is to come.  
As the mortal tries to comprehend good in the midst of evil.  
This ancient text allows us to eavesdrop  
on a prophet's conversation with the creator of the universe.  
You see  
Habakkuk knows the promises of God.  
Promises that suggested the situation the people now find themselves in  
Is not God's intention for them.  
And yet  
those promises of God  
remain unfulfilled.  
Bloodshed and casual conversations about wars  
Breach of contract,  
Prejudice  
brutality  
abhorrent labor practices  
marital infidelity  
or even closer to home  
the very destruction of community  
not nation against nation  
but family against family  
brother against sister  
husbands against wives  
parents against children  
lies and deceit abuse and rape  
from the gossip that destroys egos

to the arrogance that destroys nations  
the world was not a place of peace and prosperity.  
Thriving and abundance were constrained to a small class  
Togetherness and accord exists only in the shared grievances of the masses

How do we speak of good news at a time like this?  
How do we speak of good news in the wake of the earthquakes in Alaska  
and fires from Connecticut to California  
how do we speak of good news when cancer and COVID and in-adequate health care  
steals the lives of our loved ones and countless strangers?  
How do we speak of good news when law enforcement  
is as violent as street gangs?  
Or when an 18 year old can drive across the state to a community market place to  
livestream a mass killing of members of another ethnic group and the aftermath  
is mostly the continued debate of whether when one disregards the humanity of another  
is representative of a systemic problem or just a single lost individual...  
how do we speak of good news  
when the nation that has been a light to the world looks just like every body else?  
You still with me?  
I told you this would not be an easy message...  
But we are not the first to struggle with this question  
Habakkuk is speaking to God about all that he sees  
And ...it ...is ...horrible.  
So with complaint he goes to the creator  
he grumbles to God  
Unapologetically, he lists his frustrations to the Lord  
and God handles it.  
God is not so small minded to be irritated by our questions.  
God is not so weak to be disturbed by our complaint  
God is not so insecure to be bothered by our honesty  
and so the prophet complains  
look at what I see  
violence injustice idolatry evil  
how long will you allow this?

The days of Habakkuk  
And the days of John Lennon 4 decades ago  
Are not unlike our days  
their questions are our questions  
one in faith --of the prophet  
and one in doubt --of the cultural icon  
how are you questioning God  
in faith or in doubt?  
WHAT IS THIS FAITH?  
glad you asked  
Faith is the confidence that God will do what God has promised.

Faith is the hope that allows us to  
keep on keeping on when everything  
is going wrong.

Faith is believing in what is promised  
even when it looks a long way out.

Before we turned to pre-recorded sermons and podcasts,  
Worshippers would walk into a sanctuary, generally once a week and simply sat on a  
pew.

You didn't shake the pew

you didn't test the pew

it worked last week and though you haven't checked it - ever -

no one suspects the pew would not support you.

That's faith

the pew that you sat in last week

will sustain you this week

Now, in this metaphorical simile,

Turning on a computer and hoping the recording streams without interruption

Disrupts such ease of faith

We are all a bit more cautious

Faith is a little harder to come by in places like Flint, Michigan

when just a few years ago

Mothers turned on the water that had always been safe

and it poisoned their children

it's a wonder that we have faith in the United States

where a system of oppression and inequity has been its practice from the beginning

as it was established as a slave nation

and yet we have this hope that she may one day live into her stated values of liberty  
and justice for all

it's a wonder we have faith

the systems of this world are no less evil than they were in the days of Habakkuk

and we rightly ask the question how long God?

And the miracle

the mystery

the wonder

is God response to our questioning is not anger

nor judgment

but with the promise

for God will judge the evil

wait for it

what is described for Habakkuk is equivalent to the national situation we are living in  
today

the worst of a nation is on display for the world to view

greed military might ethnocentrism arrogance racial supremacy

inequitable labor practices

failed systems

Whatever your position is on abortion

Or critical race theory

Gender identity or immigration

Regardless of your opinion on gun control, minimal wage, Russian and NATO, or Elon Musk, Dave Chapelle and Meghan McCain

What is happening before us on live TV, reported on Twitter, and celebrated in political polls leaves us with the same question as Habakkuk

really God ???

this is your response???

Habakkuk is bothered that God has chosen to use an evil power

to rise up and destroy the hypocrisy and injustice of his chosen nation

Really God?

The lectionary splices and cuts this little text so I invite you to read the whole 4 chapters yourself.

—It's not like I'm asking you to binge watch the entire 22 movies of the marvel cinematic universe in preparation for understanding the multiverse - though it really helps...but I digress. —

What we divide as the first two chapters is a back and forth argument between God and Habakkuk.

The prophet sets the problem, God offers a solution

Point one: Habakkuk points out how the Torah is being neglected. There is violence and inequity everywhere, and all this is instigated by the institutional leaders. The prophet is pleading with God to do something.

And

Nothing.

But...wait for it

Just as God heard the cry of ancient Israel enslaved by an Egyptian pharaoh who didn't know his own nation's history, God not only responds, but clarifies that Israel's situation has not gone without divine notice, and very aware of what is going on, God is about to do something.

This moment is not the moment God has promised

This is the path our disobedience has placed us on

And like our gps when we turn the wrong way

God says: recalculating

Have you ever done that?

Just turned the wrong way to see what the route guidance system will do?

Like the Holy Spirit, as counselor and advocate, She just recalculates

Again

And again

And again

Because the destination has been set

And we will get there in due time

But don't cue to commercial just yet.

Wait for it

We are not the first to be impatient with waiting.

Recently liberated from slavery, ancient Israel rushed to build a golden calf to worship when God and Moses were contracting a society of holiness of which the ancient world had never seen. Their descendants asked for a King, and God graciously stepped aside to give them the human ruler they demanded. Expecting a messiah, the Jews followed many who displayed military might offering promises to make Israel great again.

If the messiah isn't coming, we have to do something.

If Moses is dead, let's make us a god.

If everyone else has a king, let's be like them.

Ungodly behavior escalates as it seems there are no consequences.

If Jesus is not coming back, there is no judgement to worry about.

If God is holding out on us, then can't we hold out on God?

Which brings me back to Elton John's question –

If there's a God in heaven

What's the waiting for?

Well, that's just it...

Listen with me again to the prophet's lament

It's not God who is waiting

It's us

We are waiting

for God's next move

So, what are you doing while you wait on God's next move?

Bishop Ken Carder once said it like this:

God has made some astounding  
and yet unfulfilled  
promises.

"... they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
and neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

Or, "...God will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more . . ." (Revelation 21:4).

"Faith is holding onto God's promises and living toward them, even when there is no evidence they will be fulfilled. Such faith is difficult and rare."

The God who is creator of the universe is waiting.

The God who rescued the enslaved Israelites in Ancient Egypt, the enslaved Africans in 19th Century Britain and the United States, and enslaved humans in the 20th century is waiting.

The God whom Jesus reveals as Father is waiting.

The God who believes in humanity's capacity to practice righteousness is waiting.

The God who makes promises is waiting...  
So, to borrow the phrase -  
there is a God in Heaven  
And, the answer to the question is simple:  
US.  
Or more specifically...me...and you.  
We are who God is waiting for...  
Ask...and you shall receive  
Seek...and you shall find  
Knock...and the door shall be open...  
It is not an easy prayer to pray – have Thine own way, Lord.  
It is contrary to public opinion.  
God's way may mean judging human arrogance Or  
God's way might mean sitting down with Pharisees.  
God's way may mean allowing our enemies to run a victory lap OR  
God's way might mean accepting the immigrant.  
God's way may mean they get a hashtag, a protest, and a political campaign OR  
God's way might send you back home to seek and offer forgiveness.  
What if God's way is to form you as a prophet rather than a politician;  
a pastor rather than a chaplain?  
What if God's way is to tell you to wait...just a bit longer?

It's not easy to pray the prayer *have Thine own way Lord*.

I don't know what it means for you...but I know in the past God has been transforming  
the world and the people in it to restore the good of creation  
in the midst of chaos, God's presence creates good in the universe.  
the God of Adam and Eve gives us a covenant before sending us out into exile,  
famished in the shame of sinking our teeth into portions of indulgence.  
social displacement isn't the end of the story.  
the God of Cain provides protective custody for those bearing the guilt of the execution  
of another human.  
Murder doesn't kill the transforming capacity of God's grace  
the God of Abraham and Sarah seeks the elderly, – even those worn down by  
unproductiveness and jealousy – God gives them strength to guide the next generation  
to be a holy people; a people who live in this world as part of a community of every  
nation, tribe and tongue who work, and walk and worship together as children of the  
living God.  
the God of Joseph is interrupting family feuds so a hated brother with a dream can grow  
up to be decision-maker who brings equity to a country in famine.  
when hope unborn dies in systems of aberrant labor practices,  
the God of Israel breaks the government's back  
and offers humanity a handbook for holiness.  
the God of Isaiah and Paul, who once revealed his glory in a temple made by hands has  
promised to let his grace sip through cracked jars of clay – the earthen vessels of  
humanity called to be *transcripts of the Trinity*.

The Creator of the universe spent the night in a stable so instead of Israel paying taxes to Caesar – wise men from the east arrived, bearing gifts past a wicked king to the cradle of the King of Kings. This God is Israel's God. The One Jesus called Father; the One who raised Jesus from the dead; the One who promised to always be where two or three gather in his name. And even now, the movement started by a few self-employed middle-easterners and a tax collector rocks the world.

When the fires of Pentecost burned low He gave fresh strength to a drop-out and sent a reformation, a great awakening, and revival for his church. The same God that upheld David and Paul, Deborah and Ruth, Calvin and Wesley, Mother Teresa and Pope Frances has strength for you,

It's not easy to pray the prayer open my eyes.

But maybe it's time we start a conversation with God that ends with...have thine own way...

So

While we wait, Are we willing to be a peculiar people?,  
not just saved by grace, but sanctified by the outpouring of your spirit.

Christianity requires more recognizable behavior that is Christ-like  
than vocal claims to follow Jesus

#jesusisnotatwitterfed

Among those who oppress, and ignore, and manipulate, and lie, and kill,  
Let us do good.

Let us seek justice.

Let us help the oppressed.

Let us defend the cause of the orphans  
and fight for the rights of the widows.

Let us set the captives free.

Because God's delay is God's grace.

And grace is always God's next move.

Hold out for each of us the responsibility of an opportunity to change:

Change our minds,

change the way we feel,

change our course of action.

Grant us your wisdom, strength, and grace

...that WE might intervene

...as so often we have demand you to do so

May us willing to be the answer to someone else's prayer for comradery in loneliness,  
counsel in crisis, or cure from dis-ease.

Speak a word to us...today, this assembly...

That these plans, this prayer, these conversations, this work, might serve to usher in a  
glimpse of your kingdom: a community with every accent, every culture, every  
kindred...extends love to one another in your holy and matchless name.

Or, at least, let us be faithful to plant deeply the seeds that impact the systemic  
injustices borne of consumerism, and classism in our sphere of influence.

In this moment, together, when it seems almost safe to say...Yes to your will...we ask for the strength to be your witness in those moments when we are alone, afraid, and yet are most needed to risk ourselves for the sake of your kingdom. We ask this in the name of the Risen One. Amen.

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