

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-14 ~ Luke 17:5-10

There is Still a Vision

17th Sunday after Pentecost ~ World Communion ~ Peace & Global Witness Offering Dedication

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Introduction

Have you ever knocked over a glass of milk by mistake and had it spill all over the dinner table just as the meal was about to begin? That is bad enough. Imagine if as soon as everything is all cleaned up and everyone is eager to start eating, that again as you try to put your glass of milk down, it glances the side of your plate and over it goes again. Milk everywhere, again. This actually happened to my husband Bob, when he was very young, maybe seven or eight years old, at his first sleepover. His friend's mom was not particularly happy or understanding the first time. But after the second spill she became visibly angry. Then little Bobbie got so scared and nervous. He could see that his friend's mom was really mad at him. He got so nervous, it happened, yes, a third time! And her anger rose another notch. He remembers being so frightened by her anger he just wanted to go home where he felt safe with his mom and family. And away from this table of shame and embarrassment.

This story from Bob's childhood came to mind when I read Luke 17:4, the verse directly *before* today's story. The verse that surely prompted verse 5, where our second scripture lesson begins today. In verse 4 Jesus tells his disciples, "If the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive." So, I figure, according to Jesus, Bob still had four more spills he should have been forgiven for, readily. Joking aside, what Jesus is telling his disciples, seemed difficult if not impossible. Who can really forgive another person seven times in a life time, much less seven times a day?

You might recall that in last Sunday's text, Luke 16:19-31, Jesus rolled out his parable of the rich man and Lazarus, a cautionary tale which I alternatively titled, "Just Desserts." The fifth of five parables directed at the pharisees and scribes who were grumbling about the very mixed company he was keeping. In Luke's narrative world, here in Luke 17--we seem to still be at this table, but apparently the pharisees and scribes had left the table, maybe for after dinner drinks in the next room. This final section piece of this extended dinner conversation is addressed just to his disciples, who are called apostles in verse 5, where we begin today.

If Jesus told you that you had to forgive someone who sins directly against you not once but seven times in one day, what would you do? Run for the exits? Let us listen what they said, in verse 5 and to Jesus' answer. Full undiluted gospel truth, poured out for us this day. Let's see what Jesus has on tap, as we listen to Luke 17, beginning at verse 5.

Communion Meditation

This story has always bothered me. Maybe it is because I feel sorry for those hardworking slaves. Did you notice how they are actually doing *double* duty: they are working in the field *and* in the house. It seems wrong that they don't get any appreciation for their double duty hard

labor. Every time I read this text; I keep expecting Jesus to welcome those slaves to the table. Jesus, our reliable champion of the underdog *appears* to be contradicting his own radical inclusivity. We know he ate with tax collectors and sinners as a matter of course. Why this dreadful depiction of duty right before they leave this table and head to Jerusalem?

It's about the power of faith. And the call to trust. It is *not* a story about how slaves should be silent and obey their master. This is a gross misinterpretation of Jesus' lesson for his disciples and for us. Rather it is a call to trust God and to trust God's vision. We know that God's vision is always and forever about righteousness (*tsdq*, found 525 times in the Old Testament!) and justice (*mishpat*). That is the vision of Habakkuk and all the prophets, even in the midst of utter turmoil and political calamity. That is how we can be sure Jesus was not justifying chattel slavery in this mini parable. Rather he was using a familiar social construct of his time, to land in the hearts of his disciples, the call to trust and to follow God's vision absolutely. To remember every day when we wake up, it is about God, not us.

In the land of living by faith: there is no equity building. It's about God and not us. The good news and the bad news (if we're going for trophies and accolades) is that we start again every day. Will we or won't we choose to trust God and live by faith, rather than sight? Powered by the wind of the Holy Spirit, we can achieve what looks impossible to our human eye. Jesus is letting his disciples in on the power already within them, with whatever little bit of faith they can muster. It may seem a strange way to do it, but I hear Jesus saying here, "You got this! Just remember it's because I've got you."

This is still true on October 2, 2022. There is still a vision: God's way of grace. There is still a cross. And there is this meal that Jesus has for us here today. There is still a vision even when it seems like everything is crashing all around us. Trust God's vision over our own doubts and darkness. Eat this bread, drink this cup, and see what that tiny mustard seed size of faith can do. A mulberry tree uprooted and planted in the ocean? Wild and crazy things, beyond what we can see or know or expect. As Martin Luther King Jr memorably said, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."

Yesterday morning, I got to see at a whole flight of a staircase that barely even had one step visible last December. I have to tell you my heart thrilled with joy when I drove into the driveway at the house on Adler at 10:00 AM yesterday morning. It was lined with cars of folks who had come to help clean and prepare the house that has been secured for the Congolese family of ten, we will be helping to resettle right here in Marshfield, just blocks from our church. They are flying here from a refugee camp in Tanzania where they have been living since 1996. They are the second Congolese family we are helping to resettle right here in Marshfield. The first one spent their first night in the Upham apartment on Friday.

This community project began as a hazy vision back in December. We were aware of the nearly 10,000 Afghan refugees and evacuees just 67 miles away, temporarily based at Fort McCoy. Surely, we could offer a place to settle for some of them. This vision grew slowly, as we heard God calling us to draw together folks from across our community, from multiple churches

and faith communities to offer refuge and a fresh start for folks who were forced to flee from their home country. We didn't know how to do this. Those involved in the leadership of this project had never done this before. But looking back, I marvel at how the Holy Spirit has led us at every turn, bringing this vision for peacemaking this very week into a reality. It is a beautiful thing.

I want to share two other local and compelling examples of mustard seed faith flourishing beyond what could be imagined into concrete acts of peacemaking. One, our Parish Medical Equipment Loan ministry, led by our own 2022 Jefferson Award winner, Nadene Lautenschlager. It started with a couple of walkers and wheelchairs. And grew and grew to an outreach project that serves 85-120 people per month. A ministry of healing and repairing of people's bodies and spirits has quietly grown by leaps and bounds. One step, one wipe down of a wheel chair at a time.

The second is the house being built on E. Blodgett Street, by volunteers from across the community through Habitat for Humanity. Truly a house built by love. This worldwide mission began as a vision back in 1976, and has now built well over 4 million homes around the world. I'm sure that when Millard and Linda Fuller were given this vision, they had no idea how to do it or what it would become. They could see that a concrete way to fight systemic poverty would be to link arms with local volunteers (skilled and unskilled), and partner families to build homes that would enable renters to become home owners. Right now, several of our members (well actually, several are worshipping here in the pews at the moment), along with several others across the Marshfield community are building a house for Ryan and Mellisa and their three young children.

Visions, one step at a time, through which God works to shine righteousness and justice a little bit brighter in to our broken world. Here's the good news from Jesus today, "You got this, because I've got you." Do you wonder what was is *your* super power? It is right here. It is not you or me, it is God working in and through us. As long as we can get out of our own way! God who tells us to keep looking for the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son. God who wills that no one be lost, not one. Yes, that God. The One who showed us the path of radical humility, by choosing to suffer and die for us on the cross. That is the one we can trust. The One who sets the vision for us all. The vision of peace making. Doing peace. Making peace. No matter how many times someone spills the milk, we trust God who says forgive. And who gave each of us the power to forgive. Not once, but seven times a day.

Habak'kuk's cries are not new. Just as the world was coming down around him. And the pressure of evil was pressing in on all sides. Just as he heard the cries of despair from the streets near and far, so can we. And yet he said, "I will keep watch to see what he will say to me." He did not allow the depressing events around him diminish his desire to listen to God. And neither should we. There is still a vision in the wind, my friends. There is still a cross. There is still time. And God is calling us to keep taking steps toward it. It depends on radical humility—as persons and as nations. It's not about us, or just *our* nation. It's about the whole world and all of creation:

that's what God sent Jesus to this world to save. The Holy Spirit is calling us. Surely Bob Dylan was channeling Habakkuk's lament and vision when he penned this song:

*How many years can a mountain exist, before it is washed to the sea?
How many years can people exist, before they long to be free?
How many times can a man turn his head and pretend he just doesn't see?
The answer my friend, is blowin' in the wind, the answer is blowin' in the wind.*

*How many times must a man look up before he sees the sky?
And how many ears must one man have before he can hear people cry?
How many deaths will it take before we know that too many people have died?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind, the answer is blowin' in the wind.*

Can you feel it? The wind of the Holy Spirit is blowing us here, in few moments, right to this Table of grace. You got this, because Jesus has got you. Today and forever. Thanks be to God.