

Of all the books of the Old Testament, Habakkuk is certainly one of them. That's just about any of us could say about it. Besides not being able to spell or even pronounce it, it doesn't rank up there with the better known or more influential of biblical prophecies. There is no historical information as to who Habakkuk was, or even a definite identification of when he lived. The best evidence is that he was a prophet in the temple at Jerusalem just before the Babylonian invasion and first exile.

Reading the part we read today could give us the impression that he lived at any number of different times, including right now. According to the author, the world is going to the dogs. The wicked seem to get all the breaks and the righteous are persecuted. What is good is called bad and what is bad is called good. He has no faith in the leadership, the justice system or anything else, except in the perverse nature of society. I've heard that same conversation many times on radio, TV and even having coffee with some of you. I may even have expressed it once or twice.

Well, God replies to Habakkuk. He basically says to have faith. Be patient and eventually all will be made right. The righteous live by faith. In other words, don't worry, be happy and all will be well in the great by and by.

That was 2,500 years ago. And, we're still waiting. Have faith. Be patient. Things will get better. There is an implication that if you are anxious about the world getting better, if you just don't really want to wait an entire lifetime (let alone several millennium), you don't have enough faith. You don't trust God enough.

This has some strange bedfellows. During the time of American slavery, slaves were told to accept their bondage because all would be well in the after life. That's been a common theme coming from the powerful to the powerless since time began.

We see some of that in Paul, or at least in a fairly traditional reading of Paul. He seems to boast, although he claims not to, of suffering for the Lord. He commends this suffering to Timothy. Suffering is good. It builds character. It imitates the suffering of Christ.

I think Paul means that we may suffer for our faith and we should understand that it is a part of the cost of discipleship, but I don't think he'd say that suffering was a good thing. He certainly wouldn't say, "suffering is good for you, but not for me." Or, "Complaining about ones suffering shows a lack of faith."

It all comes down to a question of faith. Does one's level of faith have anything to do with how one is treated in society. Do we suffer from the abuses of the powerful, or the wicked (not always the same people) because we don't have enough faith? Do we lack faith if we want life, or society, or justice, to change instead of waiting for the consummation of God's kingdom?

Jesus disciples asked him to increase their faith. Jesus had been telling them parables and stories about sin and repentance, and apparently they didn't think they had enough faith to live the way Jesus was directing them. Give us more faith. Make us better able to follow you. Give us the ability to change our lives.

I'm not crazy about the way Jesus answer is translated here. It sounds like he's telling the disciples they don't have enough faith. I think it is a better translation to say that it only

takes a tiny amount of faith to do great things. Mustard seeds are tiny, mulberry trees have huge roots and don't get pulled up easily.

It doesn't take a lot of faith to do incredibly difficult things. That's good news. It is also a challenge. Those of us who have even a tiny amount of faith cannot hide behind our "unworthiness", our perceived lack of faith and commitment, as an excuse to do nothing.

He goes on to pose a question about slaves and their duties. He says that there is nothing particularly noble about doing exactly what you are commanded to do. Getting by with the minimum is enough to get by, but it's not enough to generate any pride.

I think that Jesus is saying that it doesn't take a lot of faith to change the world. We have at least that much faith, so get off your behinds and do something beyond just getting by.

Paul is very clear in all his writings that we don't get to heaven by doing stuff. He says we get to heaven by God's Grace. I would further say that Christ died on the cross so that anyone who calls on his name will go to heaven.

So, being an heir of heaven already, I don't really have anything more I need to do, short of being so bad that I corrupt my character and refuse the love of God. I can just get by and still go to heaven.

Jesus tells us that although that's true, it's not enough if we want to truly receive all the benefits of being a follower of Christ. Our lives will be so much fuller, so much more filled with joy, if we take the seeds of our faith and put them into action to change the world.

Yes, everything will be better when God's Kingdom becomes a present reality, and to some extent we have to be patient for that day. But waiting patiently and waiting complacently are two different things.

We are told by the prophets that when God reigns fully, there will be peace, justice, economic equity. The righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished (the opposite of Habakkuk's reality). Luke uses the language of reversal. The last will be first, the first last. The meek will inherit the world. The hungry will be filled and the rich sent away empty.

Well, what are we doing about it? I understand, we don't all agree on what the terms, peace, economic equity, justice and the like really mean. What does it mean to work for peace? To some it means bringing the troops home from Iraq today. To others it means continue our involvement until the threat of insurgency is eradicated. And, everything in between.

The same difficulty in defining terms is present in issues of social justice, economic equity, sanctity of life, purity of living, fair business practices, universal healthcare, hunger, disease and poverty eradication, gender bias, racism and all the other isms.

We all have passions. Now, our passion may conflict 180 degrees with the person sitting next to us. And I think we probably all have faith that God wants the world to be in accord with our passion. We might be wrong. There was a pastor in a town I served that said out loud that God intended white men to be in charge of government and the church. Like we've done such a good job so far.

I think we need a little humility and do the hard work of discerning whether God would be as passionate about our cause as we are. We may still disagree, but the work of discernment is important.

With the faith we have in Jesus, as little as we may think it is, we have the power to change the world. Jesus says we have the responsibility, as his disciple, to use that faith to effect that change. He would expect us to be working in accord with his will, of course, and that's not always a slam dunk in figuring that out.

But, sitting around, complaining about the world going to the dogs and hoping that God will wave a magic wand and end terrorism, poverty, hunger, abuse, racism and war is a cop out. We can do something about it, we must do something about it. Even if it is only making a change in how we deal with people who are different than us. We have all the faith in Jesus it takes to change the world.

Maybe we need a little more faith in ourselves.