

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4**

**Sermon: “From Ear to Heart”**

In our Gospel, the disciples said to Jesus: *“Increase our faith!”* (Luke 17:5).

Certainly, this is a theme that bears fruit in preaching.

There’s a great prayer on the inside cover of our hymnals, “For blessing on the Word.” It paints a beautiful picture of the saving Word of the Gospel that moves from our ears to our lives. It is this Word that creates and sustains saving faith:

Lord God, bless Your Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to convert those not yet Your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May Your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You send it; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen. (Lutheran Service Book, Pew Edition [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006].)

The Book of Habakkuk begins with a question (1:2). The prophet, however, cannot see the answer. What he sees causes him to wonder aloud whether God is faithful to the covenant he established with Abraham (Genesis 15). When God speaks, he teaches Habakkuk that the Chaldeans will be used for the judgment of his people. Habakkuk seems to accept God's answer, but he has more questions. God's people today can likely relate.

The ultimate answer to Habakkuk's complaint is found in Christ, the fulfillment of God's promises (2 Corinthians 1:20) and the guarantor of the new covenant in his blood.

Why do you and I believe? Why do we trust that what God says is true? Because it's in the Bible? Not just because it's in the Bible but also because it's true! And our hearts cling to that truth—even when what we see around us seems to contradict that truth. In our text today, the prophet Habakkuk sees so much that just seems wrong, and, worse, when he cries out to God about it, it seems at first as if God isn't listening. But then God teaches the prophet what he also wants us to know and believe: Not only does God hear our cries, but He also gives us faith in His answers when we hear the Gospel.

So many situations in our world can make us wonder if God hears our desperate cries for help. Listen to the cries from Habakkuk's world! The prophet begins our text by crying out to God that the people of Judah are being very wicked, sinning against God. Doesn't he care? "How long" will he put up with this? (1:1-4). But then bad to worse: God tells Habakkuk that he will use the Babylonians to punish Judah. Wait a minute! They're even more wicked!

We know Habakkuk's first complaint evil in our world that seems to go unpunished. But maybe we also know his second complaint: when God answers our cry, he seems to get it all wrong. But He doesn't, this is where faith is needed.

God answers Habakkuk: write it down (2:2). But if fulfillment seems slow coming? "Wait for it" (2:3). That doesn't sound like much help! Luther writes:

**"The flesh is neither able to believe in God when in temptation nor to trust that God is reliable and certain to keep his promise. So at this point Habakkuk fights against that doubt of the flesh"** (AE 19:119).

But even when we don't see God's answers, he speaks faith in his help into our hearts in the Gospel. He speaks to Habakkuk the words that will later comfort St. Paul and Luther and us: *"The righteous shall live by his faith"* (2:4). Luther again: **"It is Habakkuk's desire or aim (this is true of all prophets) to keep the people in faith, to strengthen them with much consolation and a declaration of the will of God on the strength of promises God has made so that the people in affliction might not doubt but rather give glory to the God of truth. . . . [So] he comes finally to the climax of the matter, that is, to strengthen and sustain those who are weak in faith"** (AE 19:119).

We who do wait for God's promises, trust in him, surely will be delivered, will live! God's promises are not hollow. He fulfilled his promise to Adam and Eve that he would send a Savior to crush the head of Satan. Our Lord suffered violence at the hands of evil men to bear our sin and be our Savior. He did this for us: *"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."* (2 Peter 3:9).

The preaching of God’s Word of Law and Gospel is that word that reaches us. God has posted watchmen, as it were, to ensure that his Word is proclaimed.

***“Faith comes from hearing,”*** (Romans 10:17). This is a gift of God. Our Lutheran Confessions clearly teach that the Holy Spirit works faith when and where he wills by the preaching of the Gospel and the reception of the Sacraments (AC V).

The point is not that we ask, “Do I have faith?” But, rather, that we rejoice that God speaks to us. A Luther quote from the Smalcald Articles:

**“God is superabundantly generous in his grace: First, through the spoken Word, by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world [Luke 24:45–47]. This is the particular office of the Gospel. Second, through Baptism. Third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar. Fourth, through the Power of the Keys [that is, Confession and Absolution]. Also through the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren [or sisters, as the case may be]”** (SA III IV; emphasis and brackets added).

God ensures that we will hear, as John said it, “*So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*” (John 20:31). Even when it seems God doesn’t hear.

It was summertime at Concordia Seminary, and summer classes were underway. During the summer, when guest lecturers came to campus to teach, they were often invited to preach at chapel. The guest preacher one particular morning had served as a missionary-at-large to the deaf.

When he led chapel, as he spoke the liturgy, he signed the words. And when it came time to deliver the sermon, he walked back behind the pulpit, picked up a music stand, and moved it out to the center of the chancel, where he said, “I’m sorry, I know this isn’t often done here [preaching outside the pulpit], but when I’m back in my congregation, if I don’t stand where they can see me, they can’t hear the Gospel.”

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That wasn’t the focus of his sermon he was preaching on Acts 2 but that brief remark has stuck. If I don’t stand where they can see me, they can’t hear the Gospel.

Speaking sign language, he needed to be where everyone could see his hands or they couldn't "hear" the Word of Christ proclaimed. They couldn't hear their sins forgiven. They couldn't hear the Good News.

The prophet Habakkuk cried out from his watchpost (Habakkuk 2:1), speaking the Word of the Lord so that the people of Judah might hear and believe. Likewise, God ensures that we have preachers to proclaim the Gospel. *"Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17). God ensures that we hear.

Amen