WE LIVE BY FAITH

1. This faith patiently trusts the Lord
2. This faith counts on Jesus’ righteousness

The last time I was out doing some yard work, the mosquitoes were horrible. They have been bad this year. For some reason, they love me, even though I do not love them. One or two would not have been so bad, but it seems that as soon I swatted one, dozens more took their place. It is nice that the cooler weather seems to have kept them in check lately.

Sometimes troubles in life are like those mosquitoes. Any one of them by itself is no big deal: a rain day when you wanted sun, trouble with the car, an unkind word from a family member, a bad grade on your homework, being scolded by your boss or your parents, a bounced check, a bruised knee, a sore back, and the list goes on. And yet, we have those times in life when these little troubles seem to swarm around us like mosquitoes, each one biting and irritating us a little bit more than the last one. Finally we throw up our hands and say: How long, O Lord?

Sometimes just one big trouble leads us to ask that: Losing your job, a debilitating disease, death of a loved one, divorce, losing your home, to list a few. How long, O Lord, how long?

Why did the prophet Habakkuk cry out those words? He saw violence and injustice all around him. These people were suppose to be God's own special nation. But false gods were worshiped at various shrines. The poor and needy were taken advantage of. Immorality, fraud, adultery were the norm. The more outrageous someone's behavior was the more they bragged about it, not much unlike the celebrity media of our day. As the Psalmist writes: The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men. That leads us to cry out: How long, O Lord?

Those who tried to do right were trampled down; those who did wrong excelled. A believer in Habakkuk's day may well have felt like the Psalmist Asaph, who wrote: As for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Where was justice? It was paralyzed, unable to act. Those who were to mete it out and protect the innocent were guilty of the crimes they were to punish. Those with the right influence could get away even with robbery, rape, and murder. How long, O Lord, how long?

The Lord's answer? In two words: Trust me. That brings us to the theme today: In the face of troubles, we live by faith. Whether those troubles are small but swarm us like mosquitoes or large and overwhelming, whether we are troubled by the violence of society or the injustice of the wicked going unpunished, WE LIVE BY FAITH. This faith patiently trust the Lord and this faith counts on Jesus' righteousness.

What do we learn about faith from Habakkuk? First we see that his faith turned to the Lord and leaned on him. He was troubled by the violence and injustice around him. Instead of pitying himself or complaining to others, he took his trouble to the Lord. He prayed, trusting the Lord to answer. He called out: How long, O Lord. Faith leans on the Lord, relying on him in prayer. Faith trusts the Lord. Trust is the heart of faith.

Now in the rest of chapter 1 which is not part of the lesson, the Lord gave his answer. He would punish the violence and injustice that the people of Judah were doing.
He would use the Babylonians to punish them. They would ruthlessly sweep across Judah, destroying the cities and deporting the people, scoffing at any attempts to resist.

This answer raised another troubling question for Habakkuk. It seemed that the cure was worse than the disease. To paraphrase his second prayer: **O Lord, you are everlasting. You carry out justice. You cannot stand evil. Why then do you use these wicked Babylonians? They end up destroying people more righteous than they are. They do not even recognize you as God but credit their success to their own power. How can this go on?**

Then we come to the opening words of chapter 2: **I will stand at my watch and station myself on ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.** We learn a second characteristic of faith. When faith trusts the Lord, faith listens for his answer.

Habakkuk compared himself to a watchmen stationed on the ramparts. A watchmen pays close attention. He searches the horizon attentively. He is alert for any sign of trouble or for the coming of a messenger. When the messenger does arrive, he carefully listens. He needs to accurately remember what the message is, so that he can relay it loud and clear to all who live in the city.

Faith listens like that watchmen. Faith searches the Scriptures, not as if it were dry literature, but alert and attentive for the Scriptures are the Word of life. Faith carefully listens to God's message, remembers it, and shares it clearly with others.

As you in faith pray to the Lord with your troubles, go to his Word for your answer. But don't search the Scriptures in a superstitious way, looking for answers that God has not promised to give. Don't search the Scriptures expecting God to explain himself - he owes us no explanation. Don't search the Scriptures expecting everything to be clear and better right away, like fast-food service.

Search the Scriptures in faith, like a watchman patiently waiting. That is a third characteristic of faith. As faith trusts the Lord and listens for his answer in Scripture, faith patiently waits. Habakkuk writes: **For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.** Notice what he says: **Though it linger, wait for it.**

Often God answers our prayers, not by taking the trouble away, but through his Word and sacraments, he gives you the Holy Spirit to bear up underneath the trouble. He strengthens you to trust in him all the more, to lean on him and not our own understanding. That is why sometimes, like with Habakkuk, the answer at first seems to be worse than the problem. But faith patiently waits, trusting that the Lord is working good even when it seems like we are out of the frying pan and into the fire. For example, maybe a family is constantly fighting and prays to the Lord for help. But instead someone storms out, is injured in an accident, and ends up in the hospital. However, as they turn to the Lord in their helplessness, they grow closer as a family through this tragedy than they would have ever done otherwise.

As we go through such times, though, we cannot see the good at the end. We live by faith. In fact, often what we see and feel argues that things are not getting better, that God has forgotten us. But we live by faith. We live by faith that trusts in the Lord. We live by faith that listens to the Scriptures. We live by faith that patiently waits. In the face of trouble we live by faith.

But from where does such a faith come? Consider the last words of the text: **The**
righteous will live by his faith. Who is it that lives? The righteous.

But how can we claim righteousness? We are sinners. We are slow to bring our troubles to the Lord in prayer. We are impatient in waiting for answers. We are lazy in searching the Scriptures. What kind of righteousness of our own could we ever claim?

Faith confesses that we have no righteousness of our own, that we are unrighteous sinners deserving death, damnation, and hell. But faith claims another’s righteousness. Faith claims Jesus’ righteousness as ours.

This is no idle claim based on wishful thinking. This claim is based on the solid foundation of the unchanging Word and promises of the Lord our God. For example, through the Apostle Paul, God promises in 2 Corinthians: God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Or the prophet Jeremiah, during whose time Habakkuk probably lived, calls the coming Savior: The Lord, our righteousness.

God promises that Jesus’ righteousness counts for you in his court room. His verdict is based on the good Jesus has done, not the evil we have committed. Faith trusts that Jesus’ righteousness counts as our record before God.

God promises that he freely credits Jesus’ righteousness to your bank account. Faith trusts that our debt of sin has been paid up in full by Jesus’ righteousness.

God promises that in Baptism you were clothed with Jesus’ righteousness. Faith trusts that our shameful nakedness and filthy rags are covered with the white robe of Jesus’ righteousness, even as a bride is beautiful dressed in a wedding gown. Through faith you are the bride of Christ.

As your faith stays focused on Christ Jesus and his righteousness, you have the life he purchased for you with his blood on the cross. As your faith stays focused on Christ Jesus and his righteousness, this same faith faces the troubles in life with patient confidence in the Lord. If God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also work out all things for our good? Of course he will, even though we may not feel it or understand how.

This is why faith, even though it may ask, How long, O Lord, nevertheless, has patient confidence that trusts the Lord. Faith knows God’s great love displayed in the sacrifice of Jesus, his Son. Faith accepts God’s promise of forgiveness to you as true and certain. Faith trusts the Jesus is our righteousness. So, in the face of any trouble, we live by faith, patiently trusting our Lord, who gave himself up for us. Amen.

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