

**October 2, 2016 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Blessing of Animals**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4**  
**2 Timothy 1:14, Luke 16:5-10**

Quotes from The Access Bible, published by Oxford, page 1211;  
Kimberly Bracken Long in Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4 page. 142;  
and David Lose at David Lose.net for this Sunday, posted on 9/26/16.

**Let us pray, may the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts... Amen**

**Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ.**

**I remember well my Grandma Ruga teaching me to spell Mississippi. Mi SS iSS iPP i**

Living in St. Louis her whole life, that wide river flowed through her years and her identity more than I knew.

Here's one for today, Habakkuk, you can say it with me: Habakkuk.

It's almost as fun to spell: Ha Ba KK uK.

Spelling it is completely optional, and pronouncing it, well... let's just say, there's more than one way.

I practice the name with you, not so you'll say it like I do, or even so we'll get into the fun consonant and vowel rhythmic meter... but so you—really, we—will say it at all

In the three-year lectionary cycle, this is the only time Habakkuk will get a hearing

Habakkuk is a strange one, easy to overlook, one of the lesser prophets almost at the end of the Old(er) Testament, the Hebrew Bible, nestled with the likes of Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahem and Zephaniah.

**The introduction to Habakkuk in my Study Bible caught my attention, it reads like this:**

*"The prophet Habakkuk is primarily concerned about believing in God's just rule over a world that appears to be overwhelmingly unjust."*

More than a few times this season, one or the other of you have said, "I just can't take the news, the politics, the elections, it's too overwhelming, to unjust."

I get it, and it appears that Habbakuk, more than 2600 years ago, got it, too.

Aleppo is devastated. There seem to be shootings almost daily. Families are hurting.

Our kin, right now protecting the waters near Standing Rock in North Dakota, tell of military-style raids a little too reminiscent of Wounded Knee in 1973.

Race and economics and fear braid themselves together. Too much, too much.

Usually I keep my perspective, usually I hold on to hope, but I weep for the pain of it all. Too much.

**Almost as though he's listening at my side, Habakkuk begins:** *"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry out Violence, and you will not save?"*

Back and forth goes this dialogue with God: What about all this injustice, God? What will you do?

God's word of response to Habakkuk's lament is precise:

*"Write the vision," it says, "Make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it."*

Imagine those marathoners next Sunday morning, coming down Summit Avenue, aching with all the troubles of this world, and the placards and the t-shirts and signs, right out of Habakkuk, read ***There is still a vision. If it seems to be taking forever, wait, it's still coming. God's people live by faith.*** Amen to that, Habakkuk, that's what I need to hear, and read, and see—and clearly, please, large font.

**When the vision seems to be taking a too long, when the troubles are many,** like Habakkuk and the disciples before us who cried, "Increase our faith," we seek tangible marks of God's promise.

The good news today, dear friends, is that our God comes to dwell with us, our God comes in flesh.

In flesh as the baby born to Mary and Joseph.

In flesh on the hillside and at the table, feeding a weary and overwhelmed community.

In flesh dying on the cross, and in flesh rising on the third day, that death and injustice can never win.

When we cry out, *Increase our faith*, God comes to us again, incarnate, in flesh.

For Timothy, God comes in the faith passed on by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.

Who inspires your faith? Who has passed it to you? Who do you share it with?

For Francis of Assisi, God comes in the feathered friends and the creatures, in the cries of the poor.

For so many God comes in the companionship of beloved animals with whom we share our days.

For our congregation, God comes in a long-nurtured partnership with the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, and especially with Ibrahim, and with Pastor Amson.

For me on Thursday evening as a group of us gathered to prepare for a retreat we'll attend next weekend about race, privilege, God came in the honesty of our sharing, and the will to ourselves be changed.

### **Increase our faith, we cry with the disciples.**

And Jesus responds, "You haven't even begun to understand what this faith can do!"

In some generations, some churches, we've preached Jesus' words as a scolding, yet another fail.

But what if we hear Jesus' tone as one of encouragement, one of love?

"Why do you need more faith?" Jesus says, "Even this much... is enough!" (Kimberly Bracken Long)

You have enough, he tells his disciples and he tells us, you have enough to do whatever is required.

It turns out, David Lose writes, that faith isn't often about the heroic acts of heaven, but rather day by day

"doing what needs to be done, responding to the needs around us, and caring for the people who come our way."

We are living this faith, daily, practically, in homes, apartments and offices, on campus and around the city.

It is enough!

**The day we learned that our oldest daughter** would soon be born and would join our family by adoption, Jane and I stopped to make phone calls at a small park up north overlooking the Mississippi where it's still a quiet, little river. .

I imagine that still small river winding through farm lands, gathering the rain of countless streams, coming together time and again, growing, strengthening to become the mighty river my Grandma knew so well. Mi SS iSS iPP i, we'd spell together, in flesh, side by side, as I soaked in her ways, and she mine.

**Without the real cries and questions of faith tested by sorrow and injustice,**

Without coming in flesh, in laughter or tears, in a hand to hold, or a shoulder to stand with in solidarity, Without Jesus Christ, God made flesh, crucified and risen, this faith would soon grow stagnant. Instead, we cry, "Increase our faith," and ever widening waters carry us into a hope we scarcely can understand, and that we need so very desperately, especially now. Thanks be to God. Amen.