

Habakkuk 1:1-4,2:1-4

Psalm 119: 137-144

Luke 19:1-10

These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word

The first reading gives us some appreciation of prophetic turmoil; it is set out of historical sequence in the lectionary cycle, and perhaps that is a deliberate way to give emphasis to its insight.

Habakkuk expresses his doubt as he questions God, the questions are linked to what he sees when he looks around and describes the world and the environment he finds himself in:

“Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. 4 So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous-- therefore judgment comes forth perverted.”

It is a turmoil we all perhaps see and encounter at different times and in different ways; however for the most part in the modern world we deal with it differently to Habakkuk. In life's turmoil we distract ourselves, entertain ourselves and seek to satisfy our turmoil with a variety of avoidances, whereas Habakkuk stands his ground.

Habakkuk clarifies the vision that points beyond the *Destruction and violence, strife and contention arise* and he identifies that which is creative of 'a new tomorrow'; he knows deeply that *“the righteous live by their faith.”*

Prophetic insights are like the corner pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, they give some shape and alignment to enable the placement of the other pieces.

Today Habakkuk gives us one of the corner pieces in life's jig-saw; *“the righteous live by their faith.”* This gives us an opportunity to contemplate our placement of the many pieces that make up our own life jig-saw.

How does our day-to-day living align with the vision of our faith?

How does our investment in tomorrow, the active placement of pieces as we continue to put life jig-saw together; how does this investment align with the vision of our faith?

Contemplations such as these are how we give shape to our lives in a way that is quite foreign to the usual cultural practices we are advertised into living out.

In the second reading (2 Thessalonians), we have Paul addressing a very different community to that which Habakkuk encountered.

And Paul gives thanks for what is obviously working, working so well that Paul boasts of it to others.

Paul sees in the community he is writing to: *“your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing.”*

It is also important to appreciate that this 'abundant growth' is occurring *“during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring”*.

Paul is not writing a report for the Anglican Messenger about how well his church is doing; rather he is offering us an opportunity to contrast and compare. Staying with the metaphor, Paul gives us another corner piece for our life jig-saw.

We can once again contemplate this writing for ourselves; does this letter ring true when addressed to you and to me and to us?

Maybe we should start our contemplation at a distance; could this letter be written about the community of contemporary Australia rather than the church at Thessalonica?

Is Australia a community of which we can boast that: *“faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing.”*?

From that contemplation we can then scale down and ask the same about the other communities in which we participate and eventually we ask the same of ourselves.

In verse 12 Paul gives an amazing outcome for ‘living in faith’; *“so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

You, each of us, when living in alignment with the vision of our faith, living a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, you are the very glory of God as made manifest in Christ.

In the second century, St Irenaeus put it this way: *“The glory of God is humanity fully alive, and to be fully alive is to glorify God”*.

Another translation puts it; *“The glory of God is humanity fully alive, and the life of humanity is the vision of God.”*

We have probably already got enough to contemplate as we look at these corner pieces for our life Jig-saw, and then seek to place the pieces of our life in relation to them; however we also have the story of Zacchaeus to consider.

And first we need to meet Zacchaeus, and discover who he is.

“A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich.”

From last week’s sermon we might remember: *“that we in Australia are in the top 5% of wealthiest when measured in terms of GDP per capita; Our ‘per head wealth’ is \$44,598, we rank 9th in the world, the Democratic Republic of Congo (ranking 180) has a ‘per head wealth’ of just \$422.”*

So let’s acknowledge that Zacchaeus is perhaps an icon of ourselves.

As we sit with an appreciation that we are Zacchaeus, let's also be excited by the wonderful news in the gospel and hear for ourselves that Christ says to us: "*hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.*"

As we appreciate the enormity of this encounter, we might be excited enough to explore what is it that brought Zacchaeus, and so too ourselves, into such a place.

Firstly we discover something quite simple, in verse 3, "*He was trying to see who Jesus was*"; now although that is quite simple, we might ask ourselves what do we do, what have we done, in terms of "*trying to see who Jesus was*"?

"Trying to see" suggests an active desire, and an active seeking to discover, for many in churches around the world, there is a sense of already knowing – so maybe Zacchaeus is suggesting a different engagement to that which we have previously undertaken.

Our discovery in the narrative continues with "*but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature.*"

Two things for us to appreciate, the crowd get in the way, and he/we is "*short in stature.*"

The significance of the first is for us to name/know the crowd that gets in the way of our encounter with Christ.

And the significance of being "*short in stature*" becomes apparent when we consider the activity that leads to the encounter with Christ; "*he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him*"

The activity that leads to our encounter with Christ, is forward, ahead, it does not lie in the past, and it will take effort, a striving, a running ahead in order to get there.

Climbing a sycamore tree, is daunting for one who is "*short in stature*", there will be a risk in following the gospel.

By now we have a framework, as if the gospel narrative presents another jig-saw with corner pieces already in place, now it is left for us to discern what tree we might climb...

The tree of Genesis, that will eventually lead us out of the garden, or the tree of Golgotha, that will eventually lead us into the garden?

As you construct your life jig-saw, know that climbing parallels in many respects the process of resurrection.

Peace be with You