

At the Watchpost

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

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First Presbyterian, Luling

Daisy the schnauzer has a funny habit, that I think makes her seem more like a cat than a dog. One of her favorite places to lounge is up on the top of the back of the couch. If one of us is sitting on the couch, she'll perch just above our heads, but most of the time, she's lying up there all alone. I suppose it's comfortable, but it's also highly strategic. From the top of the couch, she can see almost everything a guard dog needs to monitor. She can look out the back windows to make sure no squirrels or birds are intruding into our territory. She can also hear and immediately jump down and scurry out the doggie door when any of her doggie friends raise an alert. In the other direction, she can look out the front windows and make sure to notify us immediately if the mail carrier, the UPS truck, or the FedEx truck has stopped in our driveway. She also makes sure we know if anyone is walking their dogs in front of our house, or heaven forbid, anywhere within half a mile down the road that intersects with ours. From her position on the couch, she can also monitor activity inside the house. She can see down the hallway toward the bedroom, and into the kitchen where we come in through the garage. In short, she has the perfect watchpost, for a dog. Not only is it strategically positioned, but it is comfortably cushioned. Who needs a dog bed when you have a watchpost?

If there is a famous passage from the book of the prophet Habakkuk, it is this one, really only one verse, chapter 2, verse 1: I will stand at my watchpost. Or sometimes, watchtower. It is, needless to say, not well understood. There's not a lot of information about the prophet Habakkuk, or the book itself. Nobody is really sure what time frame it was written in, or what specific events it is about. Most all the other prophetic books involve the prophet speaking to the people on God's behalf. So they all say "Thus says the Lord" and then they deliver words of condemnation or words of comfort to the people, words that come from the Lord. Habakkuk, though, speaks to God on behalf of the people.

And what Habakkuk has to say to God is not pleasant. Habakkuk is upset. We get a taste of that in the first part of chapter 1, which we read. It sounds very much like the psalms of lament. How long shall I cry for help and you not listen? God's absence is very real to Habakkuk, and the evidence he points to is the violence that surrounds him. Violence, wrongdoing, trouble, destruction, strife,

and contention. The law has become wimpy and ineffective. The wicked twist the law for their own purposes. Habakkuk looks around him and sees things going downhill, the wicked prospering and the righteous suffering. He looks around and sees the world is not as he understands God intends the world to be, so he has cried out for God to fix it. And he has been met with silence, and worsening conditions around him.

Habakkuk is not the only person who's ever felt like this.

God answers him, but not in a way that's even close to comforting. This is the verses we didn't read. God will send the Chaldeans to conquer Israel. Habakkuk's complaint is about violence, and God's response is that there will be more violence.

Well, Habakkuk is not soothed or comforted or quieted by this at all. He does not back down. This is still in the part we skipped. He says, well, God, this doesn't sound like you at all. The wicked are winning, and the righteous are suffering. And you're proposing more of the same? You are not acting like the God we have come to know.

Now we pick up with the verses from chapter 2 that we read. Habakkuk says, I'm going to stand right here at my watchpost. I'm going to keep an eye and ear out for God. I'm going to stand here as long as it takes.

Habakkuk's watchpost was probably not as cushiony as Daisy's couch perch. But it served the same purpose, metaphorically. A view in all directions, to see things happening near and far, to listen and watch carefully to all that is occurring. Habakkuk is determined that he is going to get a response from God, and he's not going to miss it by being distracted. He will stand at the watchpost and wait and watch.

It doesn't say how long Habakkuk has to wait for God to respond. In fact, it makes it sound like God's response came within the next 45 seconds. But if Habakkuk's experience with God is anything like mine, or anything like the psalmist's, or any number of other people, well, it took a while. God's timing is not our timing.

God's response is more comforting, but not exactly satisfying. God says, write the vision, make it plain so a runner can read it. OK. So what's the vision Habakkuk is to write? There's still a vision for the appointed time. If the vision and the appointed time aren't here yet, just wait. The righteous live by faith. Presumably faith in the waiting for the vision and appointed time.

The book of Habakkuk ends another chapter later, with a prayer by the prophet. A prayer that ends with words of faith, even though the situation is still

bad.

In a way, Habakkuk is back at the watchpost, waiting and watching for God's vision to come in the appointed time. Violence around him has not diminished. The wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. Nothing around him has changed. But he has received a word from God, however disappointing it is, and he can wait and watch.

We're also at the watchpost. Violence and wickedness are all around. We also have received a word from God, in the person of Jesus Christ. That word and promise is not yet fulfilled all the way, and so we also watch and wait for God's vision and the appointed time. We look all around, we keep our eyes peeled, we keep our ears open, we keep our spirits and minds and hearts expectant and waiting. We live by faith.

Habakkuk is a good role model for us. He doesn't pretend like everything is ok. He's honest with God about what he sees and how he feels. He knows God, and knows what is in God's character and what isn't. And because he knows God's character, he can cry out in lament without fear of retribution. He can watch and wait and live by faith. As can we.