

## A short reflection for Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> October – Pentecost 21 by Rev'd Michael Last

This Sunday we have with us the Cross of Nails, the symbol of the Community of the Cross of Nails which has its focal point in Coventry, and the themes of reconciliation, peace, and justice at its heart. It is important for us hold those three ideas in tension in our prayers and worship this morning because we are not just praying for peace but for peace with justice and reconciliation.

The reading for today's service are not ones specially chosen to match the theme of the worship but are the set reading from the lectionary for today, but they do echo many of the ideas. Let me turn our thought to just one of them.

At the end of the Old Testament are a number of books that are collectively referred to as the minor prophets; containing passages that we don't read all that often. Habakkuk is one such book, only containing three chapters and 56 verses. In a Hebrew word count, it is the fourth shortest in the Old Testament. From what we can gather from the material, Habakkuk is writing during a period of political turbulence with the imminent Babylonian invasion of Judah and Jerusalem very much on the horizon.

The book asks main two questions:

Why does God allow evil to go unpunished in Judah?

How can a righteous God use Babylon to judge sin in Judah?

You see some of this in our reading:

*O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?*

*Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?*

*Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble?*

*Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.*

The answer Habakkuk gives is a message of hope and has been summed up like this:

*"The answer provided ... is that God is holy, sovereign, and just. He will punish sin at the "appointed time" and ultimately deliver His saints historically and eschatologically."* In other words, we are called to be faithful in prayer and worship, trusting that God will hear and answer, maybe not when we want him to but in his own time and way.

Maybe the most important few words in Habakkuk's brief book are these *"The righteous (or just) live by their faith."* They are words that have influenced both Jewish and Christian thinking down through the centuries.

*"The righteous live by their faith."*

They are words central to St Paul's thinking and theology salvation by faith; not works. Roman's 1:17 *"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."*

They were words too that became a rallying cry during the Protestant reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. So, Habakkuk's message to the people of his time and ours is a message of hope. Look around - what do you see? Chaos, injustice and uncertainty coupled with fear and foreboding. How can God allow this to happen? God is sovereign and does hear our prayers and will act at the appropriate time. In the interim, we are called to live by faith, confident that the kingdom of the living God will come in spite of all that we may appear to see.

To quote Habakkuk 2:14 *"But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea"*

Today's service then is not just about praying for peace alone; it is also about praying for, looking for, working for, and striving for justice and reconciliation: the values of the Kingdom. It is about doing so with faith and hope that God is with us and will act.

*"The righteous live by their faith."*

The cross is a symbol of suffering and pain – the cross of nails is a stark reminder of that – but it is also the way God, through Christ, brings hope and salvation. We are a community that looks with hope at that salvation becoming a reality.