

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
15th June 2021**

READINGS

This is a prayer of the prophet Habakkuk:

O Lord, I have heard of what you have done, and I am filled with awe.

Now do again in our times the great deeds you used to do. Be merciful, even when you are angry.

Even though the fig trees have no fruit and no grapes grow on the vines, even though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no grain, even though the sheep all die and the cattle stalls are empty, I will still be joyful and glad, because the Lord God is my saviour. The Sovereign Lord gives me strength. He makes me sure-footed as a deer and keeps me safe on the mountains.

Habakkuk 3:1-2, 17-19 (Good News Translation)

While Jesus was saying this, some messengers came from Jairus' house and told him, "Your daughter has died. Why bother the Teacher any longer?"

Jesus paid no attention to what they said, but told him, "Don't be afraid, only believe."

Then he did not let anyone else go on with him except Peter and James and his brother John. They arrived at Jairus' house, where Jesus saw the confusion and heard all the loud crying and wailing. He went in and said to them, "Why all this confusion? Why are you crying? The child is not dead—she is only sleeping!"

They started making fun of him, so he put them all out, took the child's father and mother and his three disciples, and went into the room where the child was lying. He took her by the hand and said to her, "*Talitha, koum,*" which means, "Little girl, I tell you to get up!"

She got up at once and started walking around. (She was twelve years old.) When this happened, they were completely amazed. But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone, and he said, "Give her something to eat."

Mark 5: 35-43 (Good News Translation)

REFLECTION

We don't often read from Habakkuk, this book lies as one of the forgotten gems of the Bible, yet I find his words so right for where we find ourselves today.

There is such a hope in Habakkuk. Life for a faithful follower in his day was not easy. The nation had moved just about as far away from God as it was possible to go. There was so little belief, there was so little interest in faith, and most of the religious life of the nation was celebrated by only a few people.

Not just that, but the way that the people lived seemed to be not just in ignorance of God, but actually, in direct opposition to so much of the way that God called for his people to live.

Does that sound familiar?

Does that sound like the world of today? A world where God is little more than a swear word, or an expression of shock now commonly abbreviated to OMG - Oh my God. A world where the church is small and impotent, and the majority of people want nothing to do with such an institution. A world where the lives that people live all too often directly oppose the model that God has laid out. A world where selfishness rules, individuality matters more than any sense of caring for others.

It is easy for us, as a church, to feel lost and isolated in such a world. It is easy for us to wonder if God has deserted us. It is easy for us to think that there is no hope for the church and our future lies in a slow petering out of faith. And it is easy to believe that our only course is desperation and despair.

But that was not Habakkuk's experience.

Instead of despair he found joy, instead of hopelessness he practised gladness. Just as life seemed to fall apart around him, he found in his relationship with God all that he needed to give life meaning and hope. In the midst of national apathy, he found the strength to live with faith.

That is what God does. No matter how bad things seem, no matter how empty of hope and meaning the world looks, no matter how deep the hurt or how great the sadness is, no matter how great the void of faith appears around us, God is still there, God is still loving. God is still acting. God is still at work. God doesn't change, his power doesn't depend on the depth or amount of faith. God is God. God's ability to act doesn't depend upon the number who believe. God is still God, even when only a few dare to trust. Faced with the death of his little girl the official could have given in to grief. This is why he came to Jesus in the first place, but Jesus dallied, talking about faith, and now his daughter is dead. If only Jesus had hurried, maybe he could have helped her. But now it's too late – she is dead. Jesus' response to that despair is to say have faith. Trust that God is bigger even than the worst things that can happen.

And so, like Habakkuk and like the office in Mark's Gospel, we can choose how we live our faith today. We can live with sadness and despair because of the condition of the world around us or we can live with joy, we can live with gladness, we can live with hope - because God is here, with us.

With us in all his creative power, in all his love, in all his holiness, in all his glory. God is with us.

I say let us live with joy and with gladness. Let us trust our God to make us as sure footed as the deer. I say let us look forward with hope and praise, trusting in God's presence with us.

PRAYER

Loving Lord God,
creator, all powerful Lord of heaven,
you alone have all authority, you alone are hope,
you alone can give forgiveness and joy which changes lives.

Lord we live in a world that is so lost, so dark without you.
But we are not alone, we are not without you,
In love and care you watch over us.

Teach us to trust you, Loving God
to hope in you
So that we might live with gladness in all circumstances,
knowing that your love is more powerful than any the hurt or distress.

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

