

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
The Rev. George Arceneaux
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, Wisconsin
October 2, 2022

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4 | Luke 17:5-10

Friends, I fear I've been on a tear since last Wednesday when I got to preach as I have found myself pretty up-in-arms about the messages we get from society and even from Christianity that people are defined by their failings and brokenness, the message that our world is too broken for us to make a difference, that the problems we face are too much and we are too weak.

Our words from Habbakuk remind us of the darkness we face in the world as the prophet writes:

"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. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous--therefore judgment comes forth perverted."

The prophet names how messed up his world is and invites us to name our despair as well. So if you're willing, I want you to sit in whatever brokenness you hold for the next few minutes. As you are in that darkness, I hope that in the midst of it you hear what God reminds us of this morning: you are enough.

I earnestly believe that is what God wants us to believe, and not only that, to know in our very bones. Our inherent enoughness is very much spoken to in our scripture this morning; spoken by Jesus to his struggling disciples as he speaks to us in our struggling circumstances.

The first few sentences of our Gospel this morning are SO important in reminding us of our inherent ability to meet the problems of our lives with God and one another as our companions. The disciples of Jesus implore him, "Increase our faith" to which Jesus responds "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

The darkness of the world pulls me as I hear these words and wonder if it pulls you. The way I have read this for years was to see it as Jesus indicting the disciples for their

faithlessness. For their weakness and their incompetence. I get that sense because we might read this as Jesus saying, “Clearly you have no faith! Even if you just had a little bit, which you can’t even seem to manage, you’d be well off, but you don’t!”

That same despair in which each of us can feel mired across countless troubles can make us hear doom and hurt in so many places, even in the words of the man who we remember as the embodiment of love.

Now for the record, I’m not gonna say that Jesus doesn’t at times look at his disciples like they were the three stooges. He most definitely does at times. I tend to think of Peter as the Golden Retriever of the Gospel because he so often messes up but he always comes back to Jesus who loves him all the more.

But I don’t think Jesus is calling the disciples out. I don’t that’s what’s going on this morning. Instead, I hear in Jesus’ words of reassurance. Words meant to help the disciples where they are. The disciples seem to speak from a space of failing — speak, not from a sense of greed for power through faith, but from a sense of that darkness that we all experience.

In their words I hear them saying, “Jesus; we fail and struggle, we despair and fear for the future. Increase in us our faith because we don’t have enough to face this broken world.”

And Jesus responds by saying, “even with a little. Even with what you have” and, by the way, I suspect Jesus saw in his friends greater gifts and faith than they would have believed, “even with a little faith you can accomplish the impossible.”

And that is a reminder to us as well.

Jesus reminds us that we are enough. We have the strength to face what comes our way and when we fail, when the pain or struggle is overwhelming we can stand up again, arm in arm with those around us and with our God to boldly traverse our troubles, and guess what. Find joy and happiness. I can only guess as to what wonderful chaos is going on in the Sunday School room above our heads, I can so easily imagine and relish the community that will be enjoyed in coffee hour. People serve and are present here in this service who by their gifts make this space so, so good.

In the midst of this world’s problems, God is enough. People are enough.

You are enough. Amen.