

Scripture Readings and Sermon

November 3, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

While very little is concretely known about Habakkuk, he is expected to be a contemporary of Jeremiah during the final years before the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. According to 2 Kings 24:17, Judah became a vassal state of Babylon for three years until Jehoiakim rebelled and "raiding band of Chaldeans" were sent to subdue Judah. These are most likely the "Chaldeans" mentioned in 1:6 which would place the text during this time of being a vassal state. Habakkuk cries out at the injustice and wickedness occurring under Jehoiakim who according to 2 Chronicles 36:5 "did evil in the sight of the Lord his God". Habakkuk doesn't blame Judah's sinfulness but rather questions God's apparent inaction. When God responds that Jehoiakim will be punished by the Chaldeans, Habakkuk asks "Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One?" (1:12). Despite God's apparent inaction, Habakkuk affirms that he will watch for God's justice and mercy. In response, the LORD replies, "the righteous live by their faith." The apostle Paul will use this reply as a foundational piece of his theology.

Commentary on Ephesians 1:11-23 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The Ephesians selection is for November 1 - All Saints Day. It was most likely chosen for All Saints because of 1:18, "the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints". The section begins by describing how this inheritance is obtained in Christ by all who set their hope on Christ. How do we get "into" Christ? Through hearing "the word of truth/the gospel of your salvation" and believing. Once we are "in Christ", we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. This is made evident by the fruits of faith and love shown "toward all the saints". Paul then prays that God's sanctifying grace will deepen that faith and love "with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you". This grace was begun when Christ was raised and continues in all who follow. This grace eventually leads all the saints to Christ who fills all in all.

Commentary on Luke 19:1-10 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The lectionary readings jump from the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector to Jesus meeting Zacchaeus. Rather than including Luke 18:18-43 or Matthew 19:16-30; 20:29-34 in the lectionary readings, the longer reading of Mark 10:17-31, 46-52 was included in another year. In order to cover as much of the Bible as possible, shorter duplicate texts will often be left out of the three year lectionary cycle. Following his parable of the two men praying, Jesus is approached by a rich man who is unable to let go of his wealth and a blind man near Jericho who calls out "Jesus, Son of David". Luke places Zacchaeus as the third man who seeks out Jesus. Zacchaeus is "blind" because of his stature but in faith climbs a tree to see Jesus. Jesus, recognizing this act of faith, invites himself to Zacchaeus' house. Unlike the rich man, Jesus doesn't have to ask Zacchaeus to give up his wealth but rather Zacchaeus volunteers to give away half of his possessions. In this story, the previous two stories merge together into a story of salvation. The story illustrates all of the previous lessons about seeking the lost and eating with sinners for in Zacchaeus all of what Jesus was preaching becomes fulfilled.

Sermon "Faith of the Saints" (*[Sermon Video](#)*)

Zacchaeus is one of the well known figures of the Bible not necessarily because of his actions but because of the children's song. The more I study the story of Zacchaeus, however, the more I would like to lift him up as a saint of the church. The word saint in the Protestant tradition is often viewed with suspicion because of the Medieval practice of veneration of the Saints. Just as our nation lifts up certain soldiers to receive the Medal of Honor for their extreme heroism, the early church lifted

up certain individuals to be examples of those who overcame adversity to lead an exemplary Christian life. Paul in Ephesians, however, says that all who are in Christ will receive "the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints". Saints are all of those who, as Habakkuk records, "live by their faith". For they will be righteous in Christ.

When Jesus brought salvation to Zacchaeus on that day, Zacchaeus enter into the company of saints. It was not because of Zacchaeus' righteousness or his works but it came because of his faith. It was by faith that this rich and powerful tax collector humbled himself and climbed a tree like a boy just so that he could see Jesus. It was by faith that he promised to give away half of his possessions and make right any injustice he had committed. It was his faith that called to Jesus and "made" Jesus stay at his house for God will not pass by the faithful. All of the teaching that Luke records since the Transfiguration about humility and sinners and true righteousness comes together in this story of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus is a saint of the church.

On all saints, we remember all of those who heard the call of Jesus in their life and lived by faith. Their examples encourage us to persevere during the difficult times and give thanks during the times of plenty. We are surrounded by a great cloud of faith even in the midst of tumultuous times. If we find it hard to see Jesus in the world around us, maybe we need to be like Zacchaeus and become humble enough to climb a tree and wait. For even if it seems like God may tarry, God will come if we have the faith of the saints.