

## Humility and Patience: *Active* Virtues

Proper 22, Year C, RCL. Track 2: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 3:1-4. Psalm 37:1-10. 2 Timothy 1:1-14. Luke 17:5-10. The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost. October 2, 2019. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

Once in a while I hit a verse of scripture that just nails something important. Here's one from today's Old Testament reading:

“The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgment comes forth perverted.” (Habakkuk 1:4b)

This is one reason that life (as we commonly experience it) is not about fairness. Saying “It's not fair!” is the standard complaint of everybody from about the second grade on. Life is chock-a-block with unfairness, and there is not a lot to be done about some of it other than to endure with what fortitude, good humor and creativity we can.

Now, that doesn't mean God does not care about fairness. God is just and righteous as well as generous and merciful. But in our reading from Habakkuk we also hear God say, through the prophet, “[T]here is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.” (Habakkuk 2:3)

This means I left something off that list of virtues by which we endure in the Lord. Fortitude, good humor, and creativity, yes, but also faith, expressed particularly in humility. That is what makes endurance an act of worship, if you will

Strange to say, though it is not mentioned outright, humility is common thread in all our readings today. Patience, yes, that's mentioned, but how are you going to hang on, in faith, how are you going to practice patience, how are you going to endure righteously, if you think you're owed fair compensation *right now* for all your suffering and good intentions? It doesn't happen that way, because the wicked are all mixed in with the righteous. Evil is all twisted in with good. Life is infected with death. To assert that your timing is better than God's is a prideful act; even Jesus (who is our highest example of humility) said that the times and the season are in his Father's hands (Acts 1:7). Even God is humble before God. (Chew on *that* one for a few days.)

God is straightening it all out and in the end the renewal will be complete. "If it seems to tarry, wait for it." Keep praying. Keep seeking God and his righteousness. Easier said than done? Okay, but our being here and talking about it in this way is because this is how we get help. We understand what the score is: life is often unfair but God is fixing it. And we understand what we need to do to be part of the project: live faithfully in the gospel of Jesus.

The wicked who surround the righteous can mess up justice and fairness on a case-by-case basis, but they cannot advance or delay the time ultimately appointed for God's righteousness to prevail. Justice will not come forth perverted forever. It is we, who are engaged in patiently and joyfully working for God's kingdom, who are attempting to align ourselves—drenched in grace as such a project must be—with the divine intention to cleanse, renew and re-enliven the world. That requires fortitude, patience and humility of the most holy sort. Not that holiness looks and feels so special to the one practicing it, but you can sure tell when you see someone else doing it. It has those good effects that only humble joy in the Lord can reliably produce. Like peaceful gentleness. Or magnificent heroism. Or joyful creativity.

We are raised on a thin version of individualistic assertiveness. We tend to think of patience as a waste of opportunity and humility as a diminishment of personal vigor. I would not say that the life of Jesus, who did everything he did for his Father and his friends, who gave his life away one teaching, one healing, one act of self-sacrifice at a time, was a life devoid of personal vigor. We are not called to be wusses for God. Patience and humility entail joy, energy, dynamism and creativity. They are not passive. They are faithful. We endure by changing the world, one act of faith at a time, in the name of the One who showed us the way. Who *is* the way, the truth and the life.

❖ Slightly modified from the sermon preached at the Shared Ministry on the sixth day of October in 2013.