

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon: "And Yet..."

Rev. Annie Duncan

Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.

³ A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth.

² Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day,
in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.

³ God came from Teman,
the Holy One from Mount Paran.

His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.

⁴ His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden.

⁵ Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps.

⁶ He stood, and shook the earth;
he looked, and made the nations tremble.

The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed— but he marches on forever.

⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish.

⁸ Were you angry with the rivers, Lord? Was your wrath against the streams?

Did you rage against the sea when you rode your horses and your chariots to victory?

⁹ You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows.

You split the earth with rivers;

¹⁰ the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by;

the deep roared
and lifted its waves on high.

¹¹ Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows,
at the lightning of your flashing spear. ¹² In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed
the nations. ¹³ You came out to deliver your people,
to save your anointed one.
You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot.
¹⁴ With his own spear you pierced his head
when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour
the wretched who were in hiding.
¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters.
¹⁶ I heard and my heart pounded,
my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones,
and my legs trembled.
Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.
¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

- Habakkuk 3:1-18

Transcript:

Well, good morning, BelPres. Thank you so much for allowing us to worship with you together at home today. My name is Annie Duncan and I'm the executive pastor here at BelPres. One of my favorite places to go in the summer is Whidbey Island. And a couple of years ago, my husband and I took Largent, our dog there during the summer for the very first time. He learned how to jump off the dock and fetch a stick. He had a little bit of a trouble getting started. So check out this video that shows him jumping off for the first time.

Go get it, bud. Go get it. You can do it, buddy. You can do it. Largent, get it, bud. Get it. Good boy. Go buddy, go. What a good puppy.

Well, Largent was a bit of a mess, right? I mean, he was whining, he was complaining. But after that accidental fall into the water, he did eventually get the hang of it and he started just jumping off the dock and going for that stick, retrieving it as he is meant to do as a Labrador retriever, right? So Largent kind of went from this, like, "Don't make me do it. Don't make me jump into the water. I don't want to jump to I'm jumping. I'm doing this all day. I don't know what you're doing, Annie, but let's jump into the water." Right?

So he went from complaining to trusting in himself, jumping in the water. What does that look like in our lives, right? How do we go from complaining to trusting? Well, this summer we've been walking through the book of Habakkuk in this sermon series nevertheless. And the question that we've been looking at as we've been walking through this book of Habakkuk is where is God when our world falls apart?

Here today, we arrive at the third and final chapter. It's a chapter that's filled with just beautiful imagery and praise and worship to God and declaring God's faithfulness and how he's provided. The thing about this third and final chapter is you can't get to this third and final chapter without first walking through the first two chapters, which are filled with Habakkuk's complaints and then God's responses.

So Habakkuk goes from complaining and questioning God to praising God and putting his trust in him. And Habakkuk shows us that from chapter one to chapter three. If you've got your Bible open, check out the layout of the book of Habakkuk. I mean, it goes from Habakkuk's complaint to the Lord's answer to Habakkuk's second complaint to the Lord's answer. And then it finishes with Habakkuk's prayer, which shows us that somewhere along the way in the process of Habakkuk's complaining and questioning, Habakkuk's posture changes.

What does Habakkuk recall about God that turns his complaints to a prayer at the end of this book? What does Habakkuk see and experience that make him stand in awe before God? And how does Habakkuk go from complaining and questioning God to praising and putting his trust in God? How does that happen, right? Well, the first thing that Habakkuk does is Habakkuk remembers who God is.

At the end of chapter two, and it's at the very end of God's second response to Habakkuk's second complaint, God says this to Habakkuk, "The Lord is in his Holy Temple, let all the Earth be silent before him." And after the Lord says that to Habakkuk, Habakkuk instead of giving God like his third complaint, Habakkuk responds a little bit differently. He says, "Lord, I've heard of your fame. I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord." And then goes on for 13 verses to recount how God has been faithful to Habakkuk and his people. Habakkuk remembers. He remembers who God is. And who God is becomes more important to Habakkuk then. Then why God does things the way he does them, right?

Now, I've told this story before, but it's been a number of years, but right after college, I went through a pretty hard time. I mean, no one warns you that post-college, you go from like college, this amazing college experience to community and being surrounded by friends to then graduating and being in your first adult job and kind of isolated and no friends, right? And that's kind of putting it dramatically, but that's where I found myself after college and I was struggling a lot.

But one of the constants in my life at the time was being able to hear God's voice. I mean, every day I would journal, I would read my Bible, I would pray and then spend time just listening for God and God would show up. But then one day, I stopped being able to hear anything. And Pastor Scott Dudley, our senior pastor here, a couple of weeks ago, he said, "Sometimes when God seems silent, it's because he's listening." And in God's silence, here's what he started to hear from me, "Where are you, God? Where are you? Why can't I hear your voice? What did I do wrong? What's happening here? God, I'm desperate for you. Things are really, really hard. God, I need the assurance that you're still with me."

I mean, does that sound familiar? Habakkuk and I, we could have gone like round for round with just dishing out complaints to God, right? But then one day, I was on a run and not expecting to hear anything from God and I heard crystal clear, "Annie, I'm not going to speak to you until you believe what I've told you." God's voice, there it was again. It literally stopped me in my tracks and my run, like I stopped.

I remember thinking two things simultaneously. One, "Oh, I can still hear God's voice," and two, "Wait a second. You've been intentionally not speaking to me, God? What's up with that?" But I eventually started running again, and as I did, God started to reveal to me what he meant by that, because you see the thing about God that I didn't quite believe was I was having a hard time believing that his love for me was unconditional. I could believe it for everybody around me.

I put my stake in the ground and believed, "Yes, God loves us all unconditionally." I just thought that maybe for me, maybe it was a little bit more conditionally than unconditionally. And so that day on that run when God spoke to me so clearly, I remembered who God was. I remembered his love. I remembered that his love was also for me. God's conviction that day reminded me that if, if I'm going to be a vessel of God's love for others, that I have to first believe it for myself.

God is so good when he speaks. His agenda is always love. And who God is became more important to me than why God does things the way that he does them. I mean here that again. Who God is, is more important than why God does things the way he does them. Because sometimes God cannot be explained. His ways are so much greater than mine. I cannot begin to fathom and explain them. The why and the when and the how of how God acts and responds, don't always match with the way that we think he should, right?

But when it's hard to see what God might be up to currently, we can always look and see how he has provided for us in the past, how he has remained faithful. Habakkuk does this in his litany of verses remembering God's faithfulness, his prayer is all in past tense.

God's glory covered the heavens and the earth. His praise filled the earth. He stood and he shook the earth. He looked and he made the nations tremble. You split the earth with rivers, the mountains you saw enrised. Habakkuk remembers God's power and provision from the past. There is so much uncertainty going on right now during this pandemic. I mean, you've probably done some complaining and questioning of God. I think we all have.

This week's news of schools being online and closed, but being this online method, I mean, that's got our community reeling, right? I mean, these students, especially college students and elementary students, these students are meant to be in community and face-to-face community with one another and that's all just been taken from them. Right?

And parents, parents have major decision fatigue. They have no idea how they're going to make some of this work. How do they parent and teacher, and still hold a job and do all the other things that they do as well? These are hard things. Teachers that have loved teaching are now doing it virtually and that's all really hard.

We know that these are just the things that we need to do in order to get this pandemic behind us. But that still leaves us with this just heaviness of uncertainty and what life is actually going to look like, right? But even with all the questions and uncertainty, we can still have clarity. We can still have clarity because who do you know God to be, BelPres? How has God been faithful to you in the past? And won't God still be faithful. Even in the midst of this pandemic, hasn't he right?

Like Habakkuk's prayer in the past tense describing what God has done for him and his people previously, what's your past tense description of how God has provided for you?

For some of us that have been walking with God for a long time, our list may be very long. For others of us that maybe are new to following God, maybe our list is short or maybe our list is nonexistent. BelPres, this is where we get to be a community, a community that comes alongside each other and encourages one another, right?

So if you've been following God for a long time, and you've got a long list that shows how God has provided for you and your family, don't keep that list to yourself, share it with those around you because it may be the encouragement that they need to get through today and tomorrow.

So like Habakkuk, remembering who God is, even when our world is falling apart, it can help turn us from complaining to trusting. A second way that shifted Habakkuk from complaining to trusting is Habakkuk sees as God sees. In verse two and 13 of chapter three, Habakkuk prays twice about God's wrath, like his anger, right?

Which is interesting because Habakkuk's two complaints in his two complaints in chapters one and two, Habakkuk is the one that's angry. It's Habakkuk that says, how long Lord must I call for help? But you don't listen. Lord, are you not from everlasting? I mean, these are not soft comments. These are angry comments. Habakkuk is complaining here.

But then in chapter 3 in Habakkuk's prayer, he prays about God's wrath and it's as if he's acknowledging, "Oh, I get it. God, you're angry too. You're angry too, God." Habakkuk comes to see things differently. In chapter 3, in his prayer, he says in wrath, remember mercy. In wrath, God you strode through the earth and in anger, you threshed the nations. You came to deliver your people.

So God is very angry. And I mean, Habakkuk is talking about God like stomping out godless nations, right? But in dialoguing back and forth with God, Habakkuk comes to see that God's fury and his anger is because of God's love for his people.

In the message version, it puts it like this. God, you were out to save your people, your specifically chosen people. God isn't passive. As Habakkuk had once alluded just a few verses before this, but he's actually got a plan. It's just that his plan is different than Habakkuk's plan. So Habakkuk begins to see as God sees. Habakkuk sees that God's anger in God's anger. God has a lot more patience than we do, right? Habakkuk's anger wanted an immediate response, but in God's anger as if he's saying, "Hold on, I'm still here. It's going to be a process though. It's going to be a process. My plan involves a process." So what happens in the process? We're changed. We're changed, right?

Last summer, my husband and I, we were planning for this camping trip and one night we were going over our packing list and my husband slides in this comment. So I've got my eye on this cooler and I did a major eye roll because, BelPres, what you need to know is we already own three coolers. We've got a really big, nice one. We've got a couple of smaller ones. So you can imagine my eye roll at his comment like I've got my eye on this cooler.

But he went on to explain how we could put our dry food in one of the coolers, and then this new cooler could serve a new thing, cooler purpose, right? But before I could allow my eyes to roll again and before I could open my mouth to disagree with him by saying like, "Why do we need yet another cooler?" I stopped and I remembered who my husband is, and how he is different than me.

He's somewhat frugal unlike me. He doesn't impulsively buy things, unlike me. And so if he's got his eye on a cooler, that probably means that he has dove deep into the cooler world and like watched countless YouTube videos and read all of these reviews. And so he's probably got a pretty good reason why he has his eye on this cooler in the first place.

So I saw things from his perspective and instead of disagreeing with him, I opened my mouth and here's what came out, well, something to the effect of, "Okay, Victor. If you've got your eye on this cooler, I trust you. Go for it. Buy it."

Now, before you go on thinking how amazing I am for handling that situation in the way that I did, my husband would like you to know that I communicate a lot with my eye rolling, so it was not like a picture perfect scenario and I should work on the eye-rolling thing.

But the point is this, just like I remembered that my husband and I have completely different perspectives, Habakkuk has learned that his vantage point and God's vantage point don't meet all the time. So instead of forcing God into our own perspective, why not try and see things as God sees them. Seeing as God sees things, isn't just a different perspective, but it's the ultimate truth, right? God's ways are right. God's ways are steadfast and Holy.

So how many of y'all know that when we get access to seeing things the way that God sees them like it's transformative, it can be shocking, right? So how do we see in this way? Well, a really easy, simple

prayer to pray when you're kind of stuck in your own perspective is to simply say, "Jesus, where are you? Jesus, where are you?"

Often, when I pray that prayer, Jesus shows me something I would have never made up or never expected. A couple of weeks ago, I prayed that prayer, right? Because in the midst of so much division right now, I was having a hard time seeing what God was up to. So I took a moment and I stopped and I prayed, "Jesus, where are you?"

Now, I have expected to get a response that was going to show me kind of like what side Jesus is on. I mean, is Jesus a mask wearer or is he not? Is Jesus on the front lines with the protests and the writing or is he somewhere else? But as I sat with that question, "Jesus, where are you?" I started to see image after image. Jesus like shoulder to shoulder with people.

Maybe you're wondering what Jesus showed me in these images, and I'm not going to tell you because I want you to pray that prayer, "Jesus, where are you?" and see what Jesus shows you, because what Jesus shows you is going to be way more transformative than if I tell you what Jesus showed me. But I can give you a little bit of a heads up. When Jesus shows us things, he's always with us, right? And it's going to be unexpected.

It may frustrate us, it may convict us, but he's always going to show us that he is with us, with the broken hearted, with the broken down, with the isolated. Jesus is always with Emmanuel, God with us and he invites us to do the same. So how did Habakkuk go from complaining to trusting in God? Well, he remembers who God is. Second, he sees as God sees. And third, Habakkuk waits patiently.

Again, this is a sidestep from like the demands that Habakkuk was making in chapters one and two, right? How long God? Aren't you all powerful? But in verse 16, after Habakkuk has recounted God's faithfulness in the past, Habakkuk switches his kind of language and he says this, "I heard and my heart pounded. My lips quivered at the sound, decay, crept into my bones and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nations invading us."

Habakkuk's prayer of remembering who God is and how God has provided leave Habakkuk in this Holy trembling kind of fear, right? God's all powerful. God's all present. God is all knowing. And that should leave us all a little bit trembling and quaking, right? And yet Habakkuk says and yet I will wait patiently. In other words, it's as if Habakkuk is saying, "I am so afraid right now. I'm so afraid of what I see happening right now, and yet, nevertheless, I will wait on you, Lord. I will wait." So Habakkuk, he hunkers down to wait, but this isn't kind of a... It's not a passive kind of waiting, but it's a settling down. It's a figuring out of new ways to live and new processes to make, right?

A professor that teaches on this passage said to help understand the kind of trusting in God no matter what kind of perspective. He asks his students this question, "What would make you feel more secure, having \$5 million in the bank right now, or having a God that promises to meet your daily needs?" I got to be honest, it's pretty tempting to say that having money in the bank would make me feel secure, right? But that's not trust.

I've even heard people say that like trusting in God is a lot easier to do when you have a ton of resources. But is that trusting in God or is that trusting in what you have? And how many of us know, especially right now in the midst of a pandemic that what you have can be taken away. So what does it look like to trust in God no matter what? Well, Habakkuk answers that very question in the verses that follow.

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God, my savior."

Habakkuk is describing every single resource of his day being taken away and yet, there it is again, and yet he will rejoice in the Lord. So how in the world has he arrived at this? How does he and his prayer like this? How is he established this kind of trust? Well, it's because of all that we've already seen him walk through in chapters 1 and 2, right?

Habakkuk has already aired all of his grievances before God. He is called God names. He has gotten angry. He's complained, and yet God remains. God remains with him. God has not left. It's as if God says, "Yeah, Habakkuk, I hear you, but I'm still with you. I'm still good. I still have a plan." I'm up to something.

Habakkuk got to see God with him. It's as if God is teaching Habakkuk the difference between having trust tied to a timeline versus having trust regardless of a timeline. So no matter where you might be in your conversation with God right now, know that God can handle it all. Our trust isn't in God. It's not a blind trust, but it's an established trust.

Remember my dog, Largent learning how to jump off the dock? Well, about five minutes after his sloppy fall on the water, this was him, Largent jumping in the water, like full on going for it, not looking back. I mean, it didn't take him long to get the hang of it.

Do you think he would have jumped off the dock, if I hadn't been there with him with my crazy like dog mom voice saying, "Come on, buddy. You can do it. You can do it." Largent needed community around him. And BelPres, We have community around us. We have God with us and we have each other. We don't face anything right now alone, right?

No matter where you might find yourself today, BelPres from like questioning and complaining and whining on the dock or maybe you're jumping off the dock and going for it, know that it's all a process and it's all an example in metaphor of what it means to be in relationship with God. He can handle it all. He can handle our whining, he can handle our complaining and he can take our trust. Even if it's a sliver amount of trust, right?

The book of Habakkuk, it walks through two of Habakkuk's complaints and then ends with this prayer. Do you think that was the last time Habakkuk complaints to God? I don't think so. Right? Habbakuk, didn't just go on trusting God forever. He probably had some more complaints. But then those complaints established more trust. It's kind of just this circular process, right?

The entire book of Habakkuk teaches us what it means to be in a relationship with God. The ultimate goal isn't trust, the ultimate goal is relationship. And here's what like a relationship with God might sound like today, right? God, I can't go on like this. I don't know what to do right now. And yet Pastor Andy tells me that you're with me, so I got to believe that you're with me.

God, I'm not sure what this next school year is going to look like. God, you better be with me in it and better yet get that vaccine discovered ASAP. And yet, nevertheless, you provided for me five years ago when I was going through a really hard time. So I got to believe that you're going to be with me again.

God, this year has been rough and I've seen how you've provided and I'm grateful for it. And that gives me strength for today and hope for tomorrow. So, BelPres, this week, be like Habakkuk, bring it all to God, your complaints, your questions and your trust because God can handle it all.

So God, we thank you for that truth that we can just bare our hearts. Anything that's on our hearts before you, because you are a good God. You are a good father that just wants to be in relationship with us. So God, today, this week, we commit to bringing you what's on our hearts. And God, we thank you for your spirit because we know that in order to be all in with you, we can't do it alone. So God, fill us with your spirit as we go this week. It's in your name that we pray. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Please read Habakkuk 3:1-18

1. Read Habakkuk 3. What is Habakkuk praying for in verses 1-2? What does he want? How do you identify with him-what do you want?
2. Read through the themes of Habakkuk chapters 1 and 2. How does Habakkuk go from complaining to trusting in God? What do you think?
3. What complaints have you brought to God? Does God always answer you directly? What do you think it says about Habakkuk, and our own situations, when we choose to trust God - even when God might not respond the way we thought he would?
4. What helps Habakkuk and what helps you trust, wait patiently, rejoice, and be renewed and strengthened while awaiting God's deliverance and/or destruction of evil?
5. How can you pray more like Habakkuk in the calamitous situations in your life?