

*1The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw. 2O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? 3Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. 4So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous— therefore judgment comes forth perverted.*

*2I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. 2Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. 3For there 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. 4Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.*

Not everyone is a hero.

Somewhere is a man or a woman who checked terrorists through security on September 11. I wonder what it is like to live with that in your past.

Somewhere today there are people who pushed and shoved their way and left others behind as they fled the towers. I wonder what thoughts flood their minds this morning.

Somewhere today there are soldiers who are afraid, soldiers who will be at the center of our response to the terrorist bombings. I wonder what they think about as they stand on the brink of possibly being sacrificed for us.

Some of those who were injured will be disabled from now on. I wonder how they will deal with bitterness and anger.

Once the prophet Habakkuk cried out, "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 wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise."

Habakkuk lived in a moment of time when his nation was soon to be conquered by a vicious enemy. And God seemed absent. People prayed and still they suffered – their children were slaughtered – their enemies celebrated. How long shall I cry for help and you will not listen?

Have you ever prayed and prayed and sleep would not come? Have you ever pleaded for a new day that never dawned? Have the words could have, should have ever filled your mind day and night while you asked God for relief that did not come?

Then hear God's answer to Habakkuk: "The righteous live by their faith."

That is God's word for evil times, and scary times and violent times – the righteous live by their faith.

Believe in God more than the guilt that accuses day and night.

Believe in God more than fears for tomorrow that awaken you wet with sweat.

Believe in God more bills and debts that threaten all you have.

Believe in God – the righteous live by their faith.

Sometimes faith is like a woman who has great wealth. She stands on this mountain of faith and love and good works and peace and confidence in God. And looks down from her lofty height and wonders why everyone does not join her up there.

But sometimes life leaves us stripped of everything, all hope, all faith, all love and good works and peace. There is only a plea for help, for mercy as we have nothing but our need.

The righteous will live by their faith.

What is this faith the righteous will live by? A mountain of hope? Believing that brings forth fruit of good works? Deep confidence in God?

Or is the faith that the righteous shall live by only poverty – no faith at all – not even hanging on by your fingertips but falling?

Paul had that first faith as he was walking down the road to Damascus – he stood on great mountain of his believing in God, serving God, honoring God with his life. But when Jesus appeared to him suddenly everything was lost for he had been persecuting the only Son of God.

In his poverty – in his having nothing he was grasped by Christ.

When bad things happen people begin to learn the truth about God. When you sin and there is no making it better and you have to live with the knowledge that thousands died because of terrorists who walked through your checkpoint, there is a chance you may learn the truth about Christ. Or when your perfect world is shattered and as a now single parent you face challenges greater than you, then it is that you may learn the truth about Christ. Or when you have no job that offers security for next month or next year and you don't even know how to get to tomorrow you may learn the truth about Christ.

Jesus spends his time in the deep valleys - comes to us there. If he seems far away it may be because our hearts are stuck on some mountaintops and he is down below lifting our neighbors from the rubble - carrying those who can no longer carry themselves.

Carrying you when you know that you have done all you can and there is no merit in it – nothing you have to cling to but him. Indeed when you cannot cling at all but fall into his hands then it is that you know what faith is.