



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for July 18, 2021**  
**“Majoring in the Minors: Trust”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Habakkuk 3:16-19**

## **Majoring in the Minors**

For me, our study of the Minor Prophets this summer has been quite formative. I hope it has been for you. I thought at the outset of this study that things might fall flat. I wondered if things would get too repetitive.

I have learned that just as God spoke through the Minor Prophets centuries ago, he continues to speak through them to this day. Talk about relevancy. As we have repeated often, there is nothing minor about the Minor Prophets. Through them we learn about God’s lovingkindness. We learn what it means to be just. We learn what the Lord requires.

Through the Minor Prophets we learn that God’s Spirit continues to move. We learn that God stands in judgement over the wrongs of this world, while at the same time providing a way out through the cross.

## **True Faith**

Today, we learn about faith, true faith, that stands strong regardless of circumstance. Today, we study the Book of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk prophesied during the late 7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. He is effectively a contemporary of Jeremiah. Both predict the fall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. Are you picking up on a theme? God’s people had suffered under one invading army after another. Now it was Judah’s turn.

Habakkuk wondered out loud about that. God how could you let this happen again and again? Eventually, Habakkuk gets to the place of faith. “*Yet will I trust him,*” he says.

The *NIV Study Bible*, not often given over to hyperbole, says that Habakkuk’s affirmation of faith “*is one of the strongest in all scripture.*” Let’s read that affirmation just now. Our scripture lesson for today is Habakkuk 3:16-19. It has been a favorite of mine for years.

## **Habakkuk 3:16-19**

*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.*

*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.  
The Sovereign LORD is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to tread on the heights.*

## **Wrestling With God**

Habakkuk is an uncommon prophet. Most prophets offer God's word to those who so desperately need to hear it. Habakkuk turns the tables and speaks a word to God. In effect, Habakkuk wrestles with God. There are some things he doesn't understand, just like us.

He wonders out loud why a godless nation like Babylon would be sent to punish a seemingly Godly nation like Judah. There is a little bit of why do the righteous suffer in Habakkuk. There is also some question about why the unrighteous always seem to get ahead. Habakkuk wonders why at times things don't seem to add up.

Those who give themselves to God figure in the back of their minds that they will be exempt from the pitfalls of life, that they will receive preferential treatment. We know that's not the case. Disappointments abound. Bad things happen all the time. We get sick, lose jobs, grapple with relationships, and face challenges every day.

And in the midst of that we ask, *"Why me? Why this? How in the world could God let this happen?"*

I mentioned a moment ago that Habakkuk wrestles with God about such things. In a way he gives voice to the things we are thinking. In Habakkuk, we have someone we can identify with. He voices it for us, *"God, sometimes I just don't get it."*

He identifies with our bewilderment and, by so doing, opens the door for God to help us make sense of things.

Wrestling with God is nothing new in the Bible. As we know Jacob famously did just that. The Biblical account of Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis 32:22-32 is a famous one. It is our story as well.

Jacob was trying to do life his own way. When he tried to run from God, a stranger met him in the night and began wrestling with him. During that encounter Jacob realized that he was wrestling with God and immediately asked for a blessing. It is then that Jacob's hip gets wrenched which then served as a constant reminder of who really was in charge.

Habakkuk's wrestling match was more of the verbal kind. He gets into a debate with God, or at least he tries.

*"How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds."* Habakkuk 1:2-3

God responds by offering the bad news about Babylon's rise to power and how they will sweep across the earth flexing their power at will. As we have already mentioned that would include the nation of Judah.

## **On Challenging God**

At times, there is something in us that wants to challenge God. We want to do as Habakkuk did. Sometimes we will even express our anger. We will debate and argue. We will speak our peace.

Anytime anybody talks about doing that I'll say, "*Go ahead and speak your peace, God is big enough to hear what you have to say.*"

There is something cathartic about coming clean before God. At least it gets everything out on the table, and he can begin to minister to what is really troubling us.

I have always enjoyed the arguments that Tevye, the lead character in *The Fiddler on the Roof* had with God. Tevye had the sort of relationship with God where he could tell him anything.

James Merrick sums up the questions we have using the words, "*what, when, why, and where.*"

***What*** is God up to?

***When*** is God going to do something?

***Why*** doesn't God do something?

***Where*** is God in the middle of my storm?

Let me invite you to offer these sorts of questions. Let me encourage you to struggle with God to the end that faith prevails.

## **Disinterested Religion**

Habakkuk goes back and forth eventually gets to a very special place. Habakkuk gets to the place of faith.

He offers a prayer to God. Really, it's a prayer meant to be sung, much like the Psalms. The scripture even asserts that the prayer is best sung with full orchestra. It is a big deal. As I said this passage has been a favorite of mine for years. It challenges me every time I read it.

In pondering the greatness of God, Habakkuk learned the lesson of faith. He came to the place of trusting God, regardless of what was going on, even if things were totally wiped out.

My Old Testament professor in college called this "*disinterested religion,*" disinterested in the sense that a relationship with God should not depend upon everything going our way. To the contrary, even in the midst of life's challenges we can still hold fast to God with faith and live a joyful life.

In other words, meaning and purpose is not so much dependent upon circumstance as it is being given over to God, regardless of circumstance.

Here the prophet as he prays, "*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 stall, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.*" Habakkuk 3:17-18

That's a mouthful, particularly when you are facing the prospect of your country about to be overrun. To "*rejoice in the Lord*" when everything is pretty much taken away is a supreme stance of faith that trust in God to get you through.

For me, this verse always reassures me that no matter how bad things get, God is still present and very much at work. And because of that there is every reason to praise his name.

Earlier in Habakkuk we hear this great word, "*But the righteous will live by faith.*" Habakkuk 2:4 Living by faith echoes all through the Old and New Testaments and is the very way God wants us to live.

I have often said that "*the measure of a person is not when things are going well, but when they aren't.*" It is when things are not going well, and we are able to stand with faith that we find our relationship with God prospering to no end.

It is all too easy to give thanks for what we have gained. It is another thing entirely to give thanks in midst of what we might have lost. That is the sort of "*disinterested religion*" Habakkuk talks about, and didn't just talk about it, but lived it.

### **Strength Like That of a Deer**

Habakkuk talks about the strength of the Lord and that strength being like that of a deer that makes its way to the peak of a mountain. The deer is safe there. The higher the better. The deer is able to see when trouble approaches.

"*The feet of the deer,*" Habakkuk references is an image of the sure-footed confidence the Lord gives each of us when we put our trust in him.

That's the way it is for those whose faith rests in God. May it be that we are counted among that number.