

“Waiting on a Vision”
Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Luke 19:1-10

Luke 19:1-10

¹[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it.

²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature.

⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because Jesus was going to pass that way.

⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”

⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”

⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”

⁹Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

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.

^{2:1}I 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.

The Sermon

A man whose diminutive physical stature is not even the main reason people think of him as small climbs a tree to see Jesus, and finds out that in spite of his own smallness, no one is too small—intellectually, spiritually, morally—to be seen and valued and redeemed and loved by God.

In the uncertainties in your life, in the chaos of the world, how do you find peace?

An otherwise forgotten prophet cries for help, and it feels like God isn't even listening; cries out "Violence!" and wonders why God won't intervene, and God says,

Write this vision as big as you can make it:

There is still a vision for the appointed time;

It may seem to be taking its time, but it's not delaying.

It is definitely coming, but you have to wait for it.

In the uncertainty in the world, in the chaos in your life, where do you find peace?

In 1758, a young English theology student at Oxford started keeping a diary. His name was James Woodforde, and over the next half century, through long pastorates in two villages, in over 70 volumes, Parson Woodforde would keep that diary all the way up to about three months before he died in 1803.

On August 12, 1762, he wrote, "There was a wedding dinner at Ansford Inn to-day... The Bride and Bridegroom are these, the Bride was Miss Aimes, the Bridegroom: Cary. The whole set are all rank Presbyterians."ⁱ

It was, in the words of an editor in the 1920s, a time of "farmers, farm labourers, shopkeepers, attorneys, menservants, maidservants, country squires, clergy, doctors, blacksmiths, peddlers, parish clerks, publicans, merchants, and [coach travelers]" in the timeless villages of England.ⁱⁱ

Not much happens in the 45 years of those diaries—at least, not much in the daily life of an English countryside parson.

Meanwhile, across oceans, in far-flung lands, in distant capitals, those years saw wildly tumultuous and in many cases agonizingly despairing times: Slavery, political terror, atrocities, genocides against indigenous peoples on every continent.

It was also a time of spectacular enlightenment. Unprecedented numbers of people were being educated and reaching out further than ever possible before for human fulfillment and the realization of human potential. What would become the world's most enduring democracy was born.

Parson Woodforde would occasionally read or hear about these developments. But back in the quiet English countryside, the common refrain of his daily diary entries, usually written just before turning in for the night, was the words, "breakfasted, dined, supped, & slept." In other words, three meals a day and going to bed at night.

When the diaries were published in the 1920s, the editor, John Beresford, wrote in his introduction, "The ordinary life of [an ordinary person] passes away like a shadow."ⁱⁱⁱ

Parson Woodforde was here on this earth for the span of a lifetime. In the villages he served, there were daily happenings and travails, births and deaths and weddings and baptisms, some serious tragedies, and some fabulous comedy.

In his context, he was faithful and unpretentious. He habitually gave money to the poor, in a system where there was no Department of Social Services; there was no Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry or Children & Friends or Bounty & Soul.

And Parson Woodforde lived out his own entirely unremarkable, inherently amazing life, finding peace where he could in his life, making peace where he could in the world, just like you and I get to do.

In the chaos in the world, in the uncertainties in your life, where do you find peace?

I can't remember exactly which class, or where or when or which teacher it was, but I do clearly remember a moment of realizing—first confronting and then absorbing the fact—that nothing on earth will last forever.

I'm sure some scientific fact or distant-future theory was under discussion.

Maybe it was that the moon is and always has been moving about an inch and a half further away from the earth each year.^{iv} Imagine a few billion years from now, while I'm still waiting for Indiana to win another basketball championship, and the moon floats away. Think of the disruption that would cause on earth—

although, comparatively, that probably won't be *that* big a deal, since the earth is also moving in tiny increments away from the sun,^v which has the potential to be alarming in a few billion years.

But since by the time that's an issue, the sun will be collapsing in on itself and becoming a red giant,^{vi} melting everything out to about, oh, say, Saturn—probably not going to be too concerned about the lunar orbit situation.

All matter, every atom in our bodies and on the earth and in the planet itself, comes from stardust; I had known that already.

But I remember as a young student the arresting thought washing over me that things I had always imagined as more or less permanent—mountains, plains and oceans; ancient cities; giant cathedrals that took centuries to build—all of it will one day, inconceivable hundreds of millions of years from now, surrender their atoms back to the great cosmic Scrabble pile to be recycled once again.

The ordinary life of ordinary people passes away like a shadow.

What we have, in this moment within the incomprehensible stretch of eternity, is right here. This is our lifetime, and this is our world.

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and cry to you “Violence!”?
Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble?

Destruction and violence are before us; strife and contention arise.

And sometimes it seems like law becomes slack, and justice never prevails, and the wicked surround the righteous, and judgment comes forth perverted.

And God said to Habakkuk:

There is still a vision for the appointed time;
it speaks of the end; it does not lie.

Wait for it; it will come in its time.

In the meantime, the righteous live by their faith.

As the Bible scholar Elizabeth Achtemeier wrote:

“Habakkuk is...for all faithful people, of whatever era, who find themselves living ‘in the meantime’—in the time between the revelation of the promises of God and the fulfillment of those promises—in the time between their redemption, when [God’s purpose was made] clear, and the final time when that purpose will be realized in all the earth.”^{vii}

Habakkuk “speaks of that faith and to that faith which lives in the world as it is, and yet which knows that the world is not all there was, or is, or is to come.”^{viii}

Our moment is part of God’s breathtakingly vast reality.

When there is chaos in your life, when there is uncertainty in the world, you know who you are, and you know where you stand, no matter who you are, no matter what is going on in the world.

No one is too small—you are not too small—for God to see you, and love you, and redeem you, and find real worth in you.

And the same is true for the whole world.

You are not forgotten, and you are not lost. God knows the eternal in you.

So come to the table, if you will, because the sustenance is ready, and the guest becomes the host, and Jesus is coming to dine at your house today.

When Even at those times when your life and your world feel like they are in the midst of chaos and uncertainty, how do you find peace?

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ⁱ Woodford, *Diary of a Country Parson*, 12

ⁱⁱ John Beresford, in James Woodforde, *The Diary of a Country Parson*, edited with an introduction by John Beresford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), vi.

ⁱⁱⁱ Beresford, *Diary of a Country Parson*, vi

^{iv} <https://www.scienceabc.com/nature/universe/why-is-the-moon-moving-away-from-earth.html>

^v <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn17228-why-is-the-earth-moving-away-from-the-sun/>

^{vi} <https://www.universetoday.com/12648/will-earth-survive-when-the-sun-becomes-a-red-giant/>

^{vii} Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum—Malachi* (Interpretation Commentary; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 32

^{viii} Achtemeier, *Nahum—Malachi*, 32