

There are some weeks when I look at the news and I just want to crawl into bed and hide under the covers. This week felt like one of those weeks. Scientific American and other news agencies reported that Carbon Dioxide levels may have permanently passed the 400 parts per million threshold. The level of Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere fluctuates somewhat from season to season and September is typically the month with the lowest readings. But this year, for the first time in more than 4 million years, Carbon Dioxide levels remained above 400 parts per million for the entire year.¹ In the words of Environmentalist Bill McKibben "We're in new territory for human beings..."²

In other news, it was reported that the most recent assault in Syria on Friday resulted in the deaths of over 100 children. And due to the destruction of hospitals, more will die simply due to lack of treatment of their injuries.

Not to mention that 7 species of bees were put on the endangered species list, a 6 year-old boy was shot and killed at school in South Carolina, people with darker colored skin than me continued to be disproportionately killed in interactions with police, and the list goes on. It's enough to make a person cry out in the words of Habakkuk, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?" (Hab. 1:1).

Habakkuk was a prophet in the late 7th century BCE (Before the Common Era). We don't know a whole lot about Habakkuk, including how to pronounce his name. The short book of Habakkuk is only 3 chapters in which Habakkuk complains to God about

¹ <http://www.climatecentral.org/news/world-passes-400-ppm-threshold-permanently-20738>

² <http://400.350.org/>

God's seeming silence amidst corruption and violence, God's response, and Habakkuk's vision and prayer. The lectionary cycle which is a three-year cycle of selected texts for worship, only highlights the 8 verses of the text that we just heard. Two verses in particular stood out to me as I re-read the text this week. The first is verse 3 in which Habakkuk asks God "Why do you make me see wrongdoing?" or as a different translation puts it: "Why do you make me look at injustice?"³ This might very well be our question to God especially during weeks when it seems like the news of injustice and violence is unending.

We could just turn off the news, and isolate ourselves from the outside world altogether. And there are absolutely times when I have to take a break from the news for a day or two. But we don't have to look far beyond our own driveway to see wrongdoing, injustice, suffering. Sometimes that injustice is in our own home. Sometimes that suffering is in our own bodies. As people of faith, I believe God has connected us one to another. We are all made in the image of God, made of the same stardust that formed almost every element on Earth. So how can we not look at injustice? How can we not notice wrongdoing? But as difficult as looking and noticing can be, is it enough?

One of the most common questions people ask about God is "If God is good, why is there so much pain and suffering?" Or put another way "How can we give God credit for all the blessings in life and not the bad stuff?" These questions have stumped theologians and all types of people for thousands of years. For some, the question

³ Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®

results in the belief that God must not exist. Others decide that even in suffering God must have a bigger plan that we do not understand. Some decide that God nudges us in directions of goodness and compassion but the gift of free will means that humans can ignore God's hopes for us and act in ways that are destructive and sometimes evil.

The truth is, there is no good and satisfactory answer to why violence, suffering and injustice are so prevalent in the world. But texts like Habakkuk remind us that we have a choice about how we live in the world when so much feels out of our control. This brings me to the second verse that stood out for me. It is the last verse of our reading: "Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith." What does that really mean, to live by your faith, especially in the context of looking at injustice? A few weeks ago I talked about having faith like a mustard seed. I quoted M. Eugene Boring of Brite Divinity School who states that faith, in the Gospel of Matthew is not a characteristic of the person doing the praying, but is a relationship of trust with the one to whom we offer our prayers. Professor Boring writes that "As disciples, we are agents of the church in which Christ himself is "with us," which means God is with us. And with God, nothing is impossible, a guard against fitting God into our ideas of what is possible and coming to terms too quickly with the way things are."⁴ I also lifted up this quote from Lois Malcom, professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary: "To have faith means having our whole way of perceiving and responding to life transformed by...God's creative justice and power. What seems 'impossible' for us,

⁴ Eugene M. Boring, "Matthew," in *General Articles on the New Testament, Matthew; Mark*, vol. 8, 12 vols., *New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

is 'possible' for God.⁵ This week I'd like to add one more quote to the list. This one comes from Joel Miller, the pastor of Columbus Mennonite Church. He writes, "Faith, it appears, is that which enables you to live humanly when surrounded by violence. By faith you will live, really live. Not just survive fearfully. Faith is what enables us to live abundantly, open to possibilities, even if the world is not as it should be."⁶

Living by faith for me means to bear witness to injustice, to call it out and not let it hide in the shadows. It means to not be frozen by fear or by hopelessness. It means to cry out to God in our times of distress and trust that God is working in us and through us all in ways that we may not even perceive. It means to not simply wait for God to miraculously fix it all for us, but to know that in our connectedness with other humans and all creatures around the world, we are called to stand side by side in times of distress and difficulty to bear witness to one another's struggles and to continue to persevere in seeking God's vision of Shalom, of peace on earth as it is in heaven. On this World Communion Sunday, we not only celebrate the faithfulness of Christians around the globe, but pray for the peace of all people.

In response to the news that Carbon Dioxide levels had reached a sustained 400 ppm, Environmentalist Bill McKibben wrote "We're in new territory for human beings--it's been millions of years since there's been this much carbon in the atmosphere. The only

⁵ Lois Malcom, "Commentary on Luke 17:5-10," *Working Preacher*, October 6, 2013, www.workingpreacher.org.

⁶ <https://joelssermons.wordpress.com/category/habakkuk/>

question now is whether the relentless rise in carbon can be matched by a relentless rise in the activism necessary to stop it."⁷

Molly Phinney Baskette is the Senior Pastor at First Church UCC in Berkeley, CA. Some of you may know that that church experienced a destructive fire this week resulting in structural damage, smoke and water damage. Thankfully no one was hurt and all 94 kids who were at the church for school that day were evacuated safely. In response to the fire Pastor Molly remarked that "God doesn't send the disaster--but God sure will use it." (*quoted on the church's fb page*)

So I wonder, in the midst of rising carbon dioxide levels...how might God use us?

In the midst of racism...how might God use us?

In the midst of homelessness and poverty...how might God use us?

In the midst of gun violence...how might God use us?

In this time, in this place...how might God use us?

⁷ <http://400.350.org/>