

# ***Cries Of The Heart - Injustice***

**Habakkuk 2: 1-20  
Psalm 147**

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The images have haunted TV screens and newspaper pages over the past week: Four mounties are gunned down in Alberta by an enraged man with a vendetta against police. Their lives snuffed out. Their families shattered.

Car bombing after car bombing in the shattered Iraq. Families gathered at a Mosque in the town of Mosel, engaged in a funeral service, mourning a loved one who had been murdered - and there, in the middle of the service a suicide bomber spreads carnage and further death.

A marriage relationship in Toronto goes sour; vengeance swirls. And the father pushes his five year old daughter off a bridge onto the 401 as punishment against the mother for what he perceived to be her crimes in their relationship.

That's just in one week - and only a few examples.

We could mention Sudan and other African nations where fighting rages, ignored by so much of the world community.

Yes - we could go on and on describing injustice, brutality and pain inflicted by people against other people.

People treated as outcasts.

People whose hearts are broken.

People deeply wounded.

People driven into the ground and walked on.

It's a reality that Psalm 147 describes in its opening verses, and is depicted in this painting by Anneke Kaai, a Dutch artist. The shattered lives that we hear about are seen in the harsh reds, dark blacks and the jagged lines of this work.

And - it is a reality that the prophet Habakkuk experienced in deeply painful ways. Habakkuk lived around the time of the prophet Jeremiah, sometime around 600BC. Egypt, Assyria and Babylon were the world powers. All of them terrifying. All of them brutal. All of them at one time or another a threat to the safety of God's people in Israel and Judah.

There was another threat. It came from within Judah. There was rampant corruption, injustice and whole scale immorality to the point where you didn't know who to trust, or where it was safe. The one with the biggest stick was the winner in those days.

It was an awful situation. An awful situation that seemed endless.

On and on and on.....

If you tried to lived right, you ended up getting stepped on or shoved to the side. Those who honestly tried to honour God in their lives were a small minority.

The colour you'd use to paint the situation would be dark reds and blacks. You'd show lots of jagged corners.

It wounds the spirit of Habakkuk.

Finally he can't take it any longer, throws up his hands in desperation, and lets heaven know exactly how he's feeling. His painful venting is described in chapter 1 of the prophecy. And then comes chapter 2. Heart broken, he's looking for an answer from God.

As are many people today.

Crying from their heart about the rampant injustice and brutally inflicted pain that characterizes so much of the world today.

**We** cry.

And - what do we make of it?

As Christians, how do we approach this undeserved suffering?

One of the key ideas in the Bible is that of **righteousness**. Found over 230 times. At it's most basic level, *righteousness* means "something that is the way it was meant to be."

The way it was meant to be - human conduct, social order, nature's rhythms.

Go to God's original design, the creation spec sheet and see how He in perfection made things to be.

The **right** way - righteousness.

There's another bible terms which goes hand-in-glove with righteousness. This one is found over 130 times.

**Justice.**

It means putting righteousness into practice – rolling out God's design and intent for creation. 3-D action to God's plan.

Bringing righteousness and justice is what this whole season of Lent is all about. It is what propelled the Son of God to become human and come to earth.

Picking up broken pieces, hope to harried lives, peace to ravaged hearts, new opportunity to disadvantaged people, a future to those trapped in dead-end living.....

God will not remain silent forever.

Injustice and brutality will not be allowed to swallow up and destroy creation entirely. He plants a vision in the heart of humanity - a vision that speaks of the end, and does not lie. A vision that we care called to wait for. A vision that will surely come - that will not delay.

It's a vision that we are called to hang on to in faith.

The vision is summarized in the call of verse 20:

God is alive.

God is real.

God is in his holy temple.

And there is a day coming when every power and person on earth will have to bow before Him. Better now than later. For He will not be mocked.

Believe that.

Wait for that.

Have faith that it will happen.

2.4 ".....but the righteous will live by his faith....."

Those of you who study the New Testament some, will probably recognize these words as being the same ones picked up by St.Paul in the beginning of his letter to the Romans, 1.17, "*the righteous will live by faith.*"

There are, ultimately, only two attitudes which we can take towards life.

The first attitude says that the only things which really matter, which I will put any stock in and depend on and be satisfied with, are those items which I can figure out. The

stuff that makes sense to me I'll put in my personal inventory. Everything else goes out with the trash.

The second attitude admits that there are going to be mysteries in life. Doesn't mean I'm going to go through life with my brain shifted into neutral or low. Doesn't mean I won't tackle hard questions, or be willing to look at things I once thought to be final. It simply means that I realize I am only so big. My understanding can take in only so much. My vision of the landscape of life goes only so far. Beyond that – well, I'm simply going to have to trust someone or something else.

Eyes wide open. Brain fully engaged. But realizing that I can't live life on what resources I can muster. I'm going to have to lean on another. Trust another. Depend on another.....

*Have faith in another.*

I remember some years ago, flying into St.John's Newfoundland. It was late May, and typical St.John's weather. Bit of snow mixed in with cold rain. Biting wind. And fog. Thick fog. The plane circled the airport. At least, I think it did. Couldn't tell because the fog was so thick. Eventually it started to go down. All we could see were the banks of mist rushing past the airplane windows. Everyone buckled in. Plane kept going. At about 50 or so feet off the tarmac we came out of the fog and into the rain..... boom. Down onto the ground. Reverse thrusters. And we pulled up, safely, to the terminal.

That was one of the wierdest, knuckle-whitening experiences in a plane I've ever been on. Even a couple of the flight attendants looked like they might be ready for a "Screech In" just about then.

The only reason that plane ever made it safely to the ground was because the pilot – fully trained, intelligent, sober individual..... at least I *hope* he was sober at the time –

The pilot depended on, trusted..... *had faith*..... in his instruments and the instructions from St.John's flight control centre.

They could see what he couldn't. They knew where he was relative to the ground, the runway, the terminal. They could tell his speed and angle. Just by looking and trying to figure it out himself, he'd never be able to do these things.

The pilot flew.... *by faith*.

The Lord says to Habakkuk – I want you to put faith in me.

The rest of chapter two faces the issue of injustice and evil head-on. The Lord tells Habakkuk that's He's not lost control. The reins of the Cosmos have **not** slipped out of His holy hands. He's still on course.

You may not understand it, Habakkuk.

You may not see the full picture.

You'll have to trust me on this one.

And so the call comes to us, too, believers.

As we shake our heads in bewilderment at the scope of injustice and atrocity that we witness far too regularly.

Have faith that God still is in control.

That His sovereignty remains intact.  
That the final word still belongs to Him.

And so, in the midst of all the dark blacks and bloody reds of the shattered pieces of life today, Anneke painted the hint of a cross in the upper left - the great sign that there IS something greater than injustice.

And that is the Love of God which WILL re-create the Cosmos.  
Which WILL annihilate Satan.  
Which DOES bring hope to our lives, and to this world.

Because of the cross, where Christ defeated evil and death,  
there is hope -  
which Anneke paints as white light shining through from behind some of the broken pieces.

White light - refreshing, bright, renewing, life-giving.

Which is how we are called to act -

As people who live with the cross at the centre of their lives, their faith, their hope and their love.

Called to live as people who bring refreshment, renewal, and life where others may willfully work for injustice, domination, and oppression.

Again and again in the pages of scripture God calls His people to watch out for, to care for, to help the poor, the widow, the orphan, little children.

Again and again and again and again and again.....

Jesus himself laid claim to this mission –

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4)*

Jesus - Coming to bring justice — to roll out righteousness.

One of the participants in the latest profession of faith class said it very well when we were talking about what it means to be a church, that group of people known in the bible as “The Body of Christ” - what does that mean?

This participant said:

- “When we act, it is Jesus who is acting. When we speak, it is Christ who is speaking. When we serve, it is the Lord who is serving.”

So - even as our hearts ache for justice and mercy, what are our hands doing?  
Let me offer just one small place to start.

In front of me there are three tables. Table one has 72 cups, 72% of the world's population, representing what we sometimes call the third world. Table 2 represents Europe, Australia & the former USSR. 22 cups. 22% of the population. Table three represents us. North America. 6 cups. 6% of the world's population.

These three boxes of cereal represent all the world's basic resources, especially food. Watch how it is distributed.

[put about 25% in 72 cups; 33% on 22 cups; rest in 6 cups]

In the Old Testament God gave a beautiful model, a paradigm for how He wanted communities to live. It was found in the ancient people of Israel as they journeyed through the desert living on manna, the bread sent from heaven. God instructed them to take what they needed. Those who needed more, who had more dependants, could take more. Those who needed less were to take less. If anyone took too much manna and tried to stash it away, the stuff began to rot and stink.

Folks, there is an awful lot of stinking manna in North America!!

In this world, every 60 seconds, 30 people die from hunger and related diseases. That's the equivalent of 300 jumbo jets crashing, without survivors, **every single day**.

UNICEF estimates that global giving of \$25 billion per year could control the major childhood diseases, halve child malnutrition, reduce child deaths by 4 million a year, bring safe water and sanitation to all communities, provide a basic education for all children, and make family planning universally available.

To put that in perspective, \$31 billion was spent last year on beer. \$50 billion on cigarettes in Europe alone. \$32 billion on toys and sporting goods.

How can we respond? As people who have been given **SO** incredibly much - physically, socially, spiritually -

As we live our lives before the face of God, **how** can we respond?

Let me offer a few suggestions:

1. Manage our lifestyle

Let's reign in our spending. How many of us don't fritter away a lot of our resources in insignificant ways? Perhaps budgeting carefully, or tracking what we spend can help us gain better control. This booklet ("God's Managers") is a helpful resource. Your deacons can help you get a copy. Let's also evaluate our wants and needs. The exercise "I Need, I Want, I Have" is in the bulletin for that reason.

2. Share The Wealth

Remember the slogan: "*Think global. Act local.*"

We can share the wealth here in our community. That's why we have regular food drives and deaconal offerings. Thank God for those priviledges!

On a wider level we can give to Christian Reformed World Relief - today we are helping 100,000 families with 300,000 children conquer hunger & poverty! Your giving supports Christian community development projects in more than 30 countries world wide. Thank you so very much!!

## 3. Lend A Hand

- volunteer at food banks, soup kitchens or Union Mission
- short-term volunteer work with CRWRC

-WARNING: this could prove to be life-changing.

- eg a chronic complainer, dissatisfied w/life began to help out in local welfare hotel, the satisfaction factor in his life went way up and complaining way down.

- another fellow went overseas for a short-term stint with CRWRC and came back a changed man. He was talking much more freely about his faith; more generous; happy and helpful.

- pray and work for justice.

Remember these words from the Bible, James 1:

*"Anyone who sets himself up as religious by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world." (Jas 1.27)*

We who have lived in our affluent, capitalistically-driven Canadian society for any number of years can't help but become affected by it. It begins to influence the way we look at life-at others, at ourselves.

May the Lord heal us from that. May He give us eyes to **really** see; to see our neighbourhood, our province, our land, and our world through the lenses of faith; to see our world biblically, as God would see it --

-- and to act accordingly!