

Righteous Live by Faith – Advent 1

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:2-4; 3:17-18

December 2, 2018

There have been wildfires throughout the state of California this year. Two of them, the Camp Fire in northern California and the Woolsey Fire in southern California have received a lot of coverage recently.

Perhaps the most dramatic story is the destruction of a city called Paradise. The city was home to 26,682 people before the Camp Fire began. No one lives there now. The city has been completely destroyed. The first concern of the citizens of Paradise was survival. The current concern is finding a way to recover from the tragedy and all they have lost.

Would it help the people of Paradise if they knew that others in the past had gone through what they've gone through and were able to carry on?

On October 8, 1871, fire destroyed Peshtigo, Wisconsin and 11 other communities in northeastern Wisconsin. 1875 square miles of land were burned. Between 1500 and 2500 lives were lost. But if you've ever been to Peshtigo and the area that surrounds it, you would never know there had been a fire.

Perhaps it would be good if the people of Paradise could visit Peshtigo. It's good to know we are not alone in our struggles. Knowing that others have gone through a similar tragedy, survived, and continued living can give hope.

The countries of Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq are familiar with violence and destruction. Rival powers have struggled for control and the lives of millions have been affected by suffering and death. It all seems endless. The people of these areas, and so many people whose lives are in turmoil, must be asking the question, "How long will this go on?"

Habakkuk was familiar with death and destruction. In the lesson today he's commenting on violence and injustice. The powerful exert their power and the poor and the weak suffer for it. Habakkuk's question is, "How long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?"

The northern portion of the nation of Israel had been conquered and controlled by the Assyrians for more than a hundred years. The good news was that the Assyrians were defeated. The bad news was that the Babylonians took over both the northern and southern portions of Israel. They took the money, possession and people they wanted back to Babylon. They destroyed much of what they left behind. There was little of no hope in Israel.

The second portion of our lesson today is God's response to the question, "How long?" God tells Habakkuk to write his response in large letters so that even those in a hurry can see it. His words are still famous ones today. "The righteous shall live by faith." Faith can lead us to hope.

The word “righteous” means more than being good at following rules. It means having your life in good order. It means having what you need and using it to make life better for yourself and others. It means being in a proper relationship with God and others. Righteousness doesn’t need to take place when everything is perfect. Things are made right in our hearts and our minds when we believe.

Today we begin the Advent season. It’s a season of hope. In a world of darkness, the message of Advent is the promise of light. Hope comes from the promise that **Jesus will return**. That promise contains the guarantee that someday violence and destruction will end. Someday pain and death will end. Someday there will be no sorrow and no tears.

Advent is a time of preparation for remembering. Christmas is coming near and it reminds us of death and destruction. **Jesus**, the Son of God, **came into our world** and shared the promise of God’s love in word and action. But he was a victim of violence and injustice. He was tortured and killed. And then he was raised from the dead. With his resurrection came the promise of forgiveness and life beyond this life.

And love! With the resurrection of Jesus comes the promise that **we are now and always in the loving hands of God**. Nothing, not even death, can break that guarantee. We find strength and comfort and hope in the faith that tells us that Jesus came, he’s here and he will come again.

You can’t read a newspaper or watch the news without hearing of violence and destruction. When we face difficult times, it’s good to remember others who have also suffered yet continued on. Because of the example of others, we can have hope.

Our greatest hope comes from our faith. We believe that God does hear us when we ask, “How long?” He’s response is that I have been with you, I will be with you and even now I am with you.

Habakkuk even goes beyond hope. He says, “I will **rejoice** in the Lord.” If you look at the banners you’ll know we’ll take up that theme in two weeks. AMEN