

God Has View

Sermon, November 10, 2019

Texts: Psalm 73, Habakkuk 1:1-13, 2:1-4

In our Scripture readings this morning, both the psalmist and the prophet Habakkuk express discouragement. From their point of view, things seem bleak, the evil seem to prosper, lawlessness prevails, and it looks as if God is just tolerating it all. Both writers, however, go to God with their concerns. As they do, they learn, as Madeleine L'Engle put it so well, "*Human beings have a point of view. God has view.*" God has view! We have our own limited points of view, which may or may not be accurate, but GOD HAS VIEW ... the highest, clearest and best view of all! There's a sermon in itself here, but we as a church and we as individuals need to do all we can to make sure our points of view align with HIS view. His perspective is best! And He really knows ... and *wants* ... what is best for us.

This past July 15 my long-time friend (*and best man in my wedding*) celebrated the 45th anniversary of his 21st birthday (*66th, for those who don't want to do the math*). Rob is now an ophthalmologist in Bethlehem, PA; he celebrated this birthday in a unique way. He and a group of friends rode their Harleys over the entire span of the original and iconic Route 66 (*2,444 miles, according to Wikipedia*). He had invited me to join them ... even though I ride a Honda Goldwing, not a Harley ... but I just couldn't get away this past July. I told him maybe I'll do a similar celebration in five years ... and ride the entire span of Interstate 70.

I remember very clearly that 37 years ago Rob wasn't sure he'd live to see his 30th birthday, let alone his sixty-sixth. It was July 27, 1982; July 27, as some of you know, happens to be my birthday (*and Sophie Curran's*). Rob and I were on vacation together; both of us were bachelors at the time; he was in medical school and I was just starting out in full time ministry as the Christian Education Director at a Baptist church while attending seminary part-time (*neither of us had any money*). We were taking a low-budget motorcycle journey through the Adirondack Mountains and beyond. We both enjoyed the outdoors; I also had some experience with wilderness youth ministry involving mountain and technical rock climbing. That particular July day 37 years ago, my 28th birthday, we were planning to climb Giant Mountain, a mile-high peak approx. fifteen miles from Lake Placid. As we rode up Route 73 to the trailhead, we noticed a beautiful, cascading, mountain waterfall off in the distance. After dismounting our bikes and securing our gear, we proceeded to veer off the official trail a bit to find this waterfall, and find it we did. When we reached it, we made the rather impetuous decision to free-climb the craggy sides of the cascade. **From our point of view**, it looked like a fairly easy climb, though we couldn't quite see the top. We started climbing, and initially, the going was rather easy... large stones, secure footholds, and so on made it just a little more challenging than ascending a staircase; also, we had lots of cool water to refresh us along the way. As we progressed, however, it got a bit steeper, a bit rougher, a bit sheerer; the handholds and footholds were starting to become finger-holds and toe-holds. With that cocky overconfidence endemic to young men, that illusion of personal invulnerability and invincibility that says bad things only happen to other people, we kept going. About four-fifths of the way up, the going not only got difficult, it became impossible. We had both somehow scrambled to precarious perches a short distance apart from each other, and both found ourselves stuck and immobilized on what were now almost sheer rock walls. Neither of us could move backward nor forward. We were both quite literally stuck. We had not foreseen the growing danger involved in our reckless undertaking; we had recklessly over-extended and over-committed ourselves, and we were in very real mortal danger. Rocks I desperately groped came loose in my hands; a little ledge on which Rob tried to step crumbled beneath his feet, and we both heard the distant sounds as the debris careened down the sides of the cliff, ending ten or fifteen seconds later with an almost inaudible " splash " in the ravine far, far below.



Roaring Brook Falls near Giant; affectionately known to us as "Death Falls", with arrows at our starting point and our final ledge of safety. Picture taken last Oct. from the road @ ¼ -½ mile away

Interestingly enough, my first thoughts were for Rob. With a sense of burning shame I wondered, "*How could I have been so irresponsible as to get him into this predicament?*" I was the experienced climber, I should have known better. While I was feeling sorry for Rob and dealing with this sense of shame and regret, he surprised me (*and I think he surprised himself*) by somehow scrambling up to a higher place. He managed to reach a safe ledge/shelf above me, and he was OK. I was still hopelessly stuck, but still my thoughts were for him

... I actually worried what a horrible impression and bitter memory it would leave him if he had to watch me fall down that ravine. Then I thought, "*Heck with Rob!*" and I just worried about myself! I was still stuck; my hands were starting to slip from the perspiration, my legs were starting to shake. As a fledgling seminarian and full time church employee, I actually thought to myself, "*What a great illustration for a sermon someday! If I survive this.*" Here I was, just like

a sinner in need of a Savior. I had put myself into a precarious and dangerous predicament through my own impetuous *"I can do this on my own"* irresponsibility, and I literally could not save myself. I needed help. The help I needed could **only** come from above ... *from someone who had view*. Rob was now above me, in a safe place on sure footing, and he could see things that I couldn't see. **ROB HAD VIEW**. He said, *"Steve, about one foot or so above your reach is a solid handhold. I can see it, I can reach it, it is solid ... but you are going to have to jump to reach it."* My heart racing, palms sweating, and legs shaking like sewing machine bobbins, I kept hearing Rob saying calmly, soothingly, *"Steve, just jump. Jump hard and high and grab hold of that handhold."*

Some of you were here fourteen years ago when I last told this story (*most of the current Confirmation class hadn't been born yet!*). While rehearsing the story to my children in the car on the way to church that morning, I asked, *"What do you think happened next?"* Then-eleven year old Steve piped up, *"You jumped, and Dr. Weber said, 'Ha, ha just kidding!'"* No, that's not what happened. Nor did I reply to Rob, *"That's may be the right way for you, Rob, but I don't think it'll work for me. I have to find my own way here; I gotta do what's right for me as I see it!"* Nor did I say, *"Stop telling me what to do! Who do you think you are? Why do you always insist that your way is the only way to go?"* Common sense dictated there was nothing else I could do. I had to believe his view, his perspective, was better; I had to believe he really could see things from above I just could not see from my limited perspective. He had view! I also had to trust him as my friend, that he had my best interests at heart. He would not ask me to do something that would cause me harm; he really wanted to see me safely through. I literally had to exercise blind trust in my friend Rob and take a literal leap of faith.

GOD HAS VIEW. God's perspective is much, much "higher" than ours; so much better and broader than our very limited ones. In fact, His perspective is not even limited by time. He sees the future, the past, and the present. And He tells us to trust Him, to take the "leaps" of faith as He directs. We are to live by faith, to live as He would have us live, to do what He calls us to do. Even when (*and perhaps, especially when*) things do not seem to make sense, we must trust that He sees things from a better, clearer, higher perspective than ours. No matter what life might bring our way, God doesn't want us to remain immobilized and stuck on precarious, fragile ledges of despair, or grief, or fear. So at times He directs us to *jump* ... even when we can't see where we will land, even when we can't see how we are going to ever be able to hold on, even when we don't know the outcome.

You know how the story ends: obviously, I'm here. I had to make that literal leap of faith, knowing full well that once I left my little four-inch ledge I probably would not be able to find it again should I miss the handhold above. Well, jump I did. My desperate leap was boosted by a surge of adrenaline which shot my then-235 pound frame high in the air; my desperately groping right hand sailed *past* the handhold, and it landed on a smooth, slippery, wet, flat rock surface! For a split second I slid *backward*. Rob reached down, grabbed my wrist, and forcefully guided and jammed my hand into the handhold I had missed, and sure enough, it was a secure handhold. It was solid, it held, and I managed to scramble to the ledge where the "all-seeing Rob" stood (*appropriate that he is now an ophthalmologist!*). Together, we easily managed the remainder of the climb. I learned that there's nothing like being in danger to make me extremely aware of just how fragile I was...and in this case, just how *big* I was and just how hard I would have fallen, left to my own devices. No matter how smart we may think we are, no matter how wise we may think we are, no matter how much we want to do things our way, we must believe that God's perspective is higher, better than ours. His ways are not always our ways, but His ways are *better*. Because HE HAS VIEW.

And the Psalmist laments, *"But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold."* Habakkuk cries out, in so many words, *"Where are you, God? We are in trouble, can't you see? The law is ignored, it is ineffectual, it never is put into practice. Injustice reigns. Why do you permit this, God? Why do you put me in the middle of this? Why don't you intervene?"* Habakkuk's nation was in a precarious position. In verses 5-11, God answers Habakkuk's complaint. God is going to intervene, but not in a way Habakkuk expects. If the prophet thinks he had problems understanding God before, he must really be confused after God's answer! God says He will use Babylon, a nation more wicked than the Israelites, to further His purposes. They are going to ruthlessly sweep through the nation like a hurricane, *"their hordes will advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand (v. 9).* This is a prophecy of the Babylonian Captivity. One of the darkest hours of Jewish history is about to commence. In the remainder of the chapter, Habakkuk wonders how God can allow this to happen. Note, though, that he is determined to get an answer! Chapter 2:1 - *"I will stand at my watch, and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint."* Habakkuk goes to his "station" to await an answer from God. God does eventually give Habakkuk an answer. Many terrible things will happen at the hand of the Babylonians, but the Babylonians will also "get it" in the end. God says, in so many words, (v. 4) *"In the midst of what is to come, Habakkuk, remember this basic lesson: The Righteous Shall Live By Faith."* (*Perhaps better translated, "The righteous shall go on living by faith," for the verb implies a continuous action, not a static situation*).

This is the first time we see this familiar phrase in the Scriptures. In the midst of this black hour, probably the blackest hour of Jewish history, in the midst of all our dark hours, God says to His people, *"No matter what happens, no matter how bad things might become, trust Me. I have shown you enough about Myself and My character that you may know I am just, I am fair, I am right, I am good. Do as I direct. Follow My imperatives. Trust Me, because I HAVE VIEW ... and go on living by faith!"*