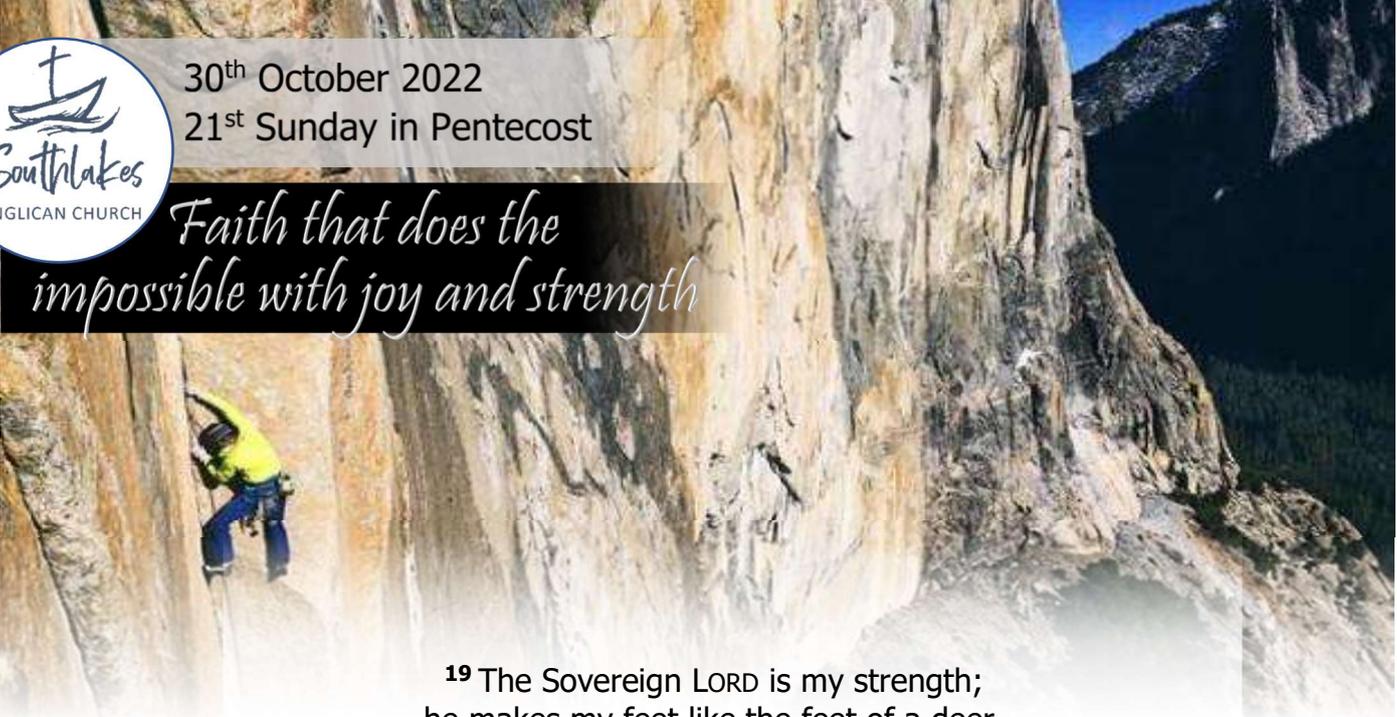




30th October 2022
21st Sunday in Pentecost

Faith that does the impossible with joy and strength



19 The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.
(Habakkuk 3:19)

Main Point:

How do you offer faith-filled praise to God when the situation before you seems impossible?

That was the struggle felt by the prophet Habakkuk. He lived in a time when God's people faced certain annihilation. God had chosen to use the evil Babylonians to judge his rebellious people.

Yet Habakkuk was determined to learn how those who trust in God's goodness can praise God, even while traversing a treacherously dangerous and evil world.

Intro | Let me start by asking a strange question, "Do you think 'faith' can be seen?"

Before you answer, let me tell you about my best friend's son, James. One of James' favourite hobbies is rock-climbing. His idea of a great afternoon is finding a huge cliff face, so he can try to work out how to scale up it!

It is actually quite an amazing sight to see. One time, I watched him stand facing the rock wall that was several storeys high. His eyes were scaling the wall studying the bumps and cracks carefully.

Then he turned to me, and with a cheeky grin, set off scampering like a gecko up the cliff face.



I watched in wonder: 'how on earth does he do that?'

I'd like to use this image of James' ability to climb a seemingly impossible rock wall, as a metaphor of what it is like for us to believe in the goodness of God, in the face of tragedy, evil or impending disaster.

Have you ever heard someone say: 'I don't know how you can believe that there is a God. With our world clearly going from bad to worse – how on earth can you believe there is a God in control? And with all the suffering and injustice, how on earth can you think that this God is good? Surely a good God wouldn't just stand by while evil people keep hurting others and do nothing to stop them? How can you call that God fair and just?'

What seems impossible to them, is possible for us – because of faith.

So, let me ask again, 'do you think faith can be seen?'
I, of course, do believe that faith can be seen.

Point 1 | The invisibility of faith can be made visible when we actively demonstrate our belief in what's only possible through faith in God.

I believe, every day as we hold onto our faith in God's goodness, and the surety of Jesus' return to restore our broken world – we are doing something that seems as impossible as scaling a vertical cliff face – in the eyes of those who don't have faith.

Every time we make a choice to believe in God's faithfulness to fulfil His promises – it is like we are climbing up a vertical rock wall -and in that process, we bring our faith into the realm where it can be seen by others. What is impossible for them, is possible through faith in God.

Let's see how this 'making faith visible' became obvious in the life of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk was quite literally, caught in a rock and a hard place! Habakkuk lived at the time in Jerusalem's story where so much evil thrived, and no effort was being made to hide it.

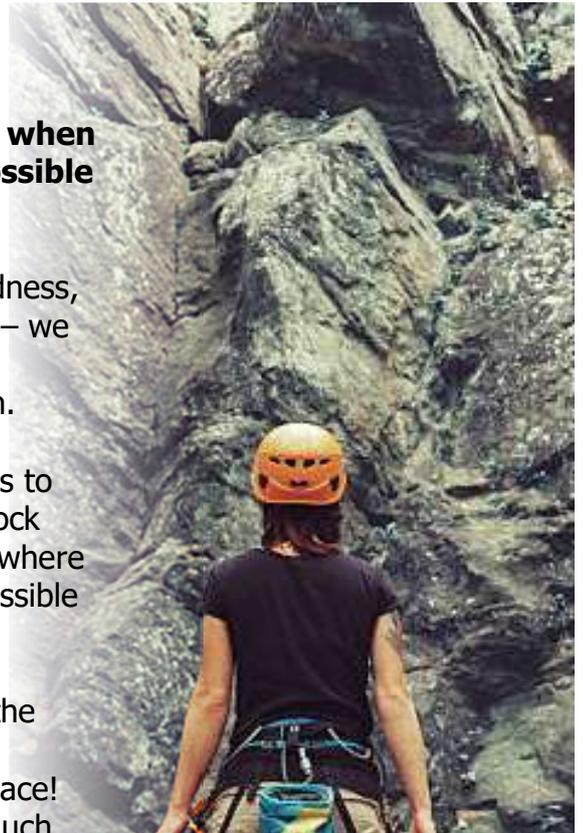
As he looked over the protective walls of Jerusalem, he saw the rising threat of the Babylonian army – it was galloping toward him like an impenetrable wall of evil and destruction.

'Where is God?' Habakkuk asked, 'How long would He allow this mess to continue?'
Now Habakkuk is different from the other prophets. He didn't confront God's people at all. Rather, it is like we are reading the pages of his private prayer journal – where he feels at liberty to cry out to God over the injustices, he saw all around him.

He was struggling with how to believe that God is good when there is so much evil and tragedy in the world – and he just didn't see God do anything about it.

What was obvious to Habakkuk was that God's people were completely ignoring God's law, violence and injustice was everywhere, and there was rampant corruption in Israel's leadership. Surely a good God would do something, Habakkuk cried! (Habakkuk 1:1-4)

Well, God in His faithfulness does respond.



God says that He's very aware of the corruption of His people and that He's going to summon the armies of Babylon to bring down His justice on their rebellion. But Habakkuk has a problem with this answer and so he offers his second complaint.

He says, 'But Babylon is even worse than Israel! They are more corrupt, more violent; they've made their own military power their god, they treat humans like animals. (1:5-11)

So, Habakkuk says, 'how can you, a holy good God use such corrupt nations as your instruments in history?' (1:12-17) Habakkuk is so determined for an explanation, he tells God that he is going to set himself up as a watchman on the city walls, waiting for God's response.

And, again, I want us to notice – God does respond and by so doing, His faithfulness is again demonstrated. God tells Habakkuk to turn the page of his prayer journal and get ready to write down what he sees and hears. It's a vision about an appointed time in the future, that even though it may seem slow in coming, it will eventually come. (2:2-3)

In fact, God says that the righteous person will live by their faith in this hope and vision. (2:4) So, what is this divine promise that Habakkuk is supposed to write down?

Point 2 | God's promise is sure and trustworthy: He is attentive to the cries of His people and He will judge oppressive nations.

It's that God will bring Babylon down. In fact, God holds all nations accountable to His justice and so Babylon will fall along with any other nation that acts like them.

God then pronounces a series of woes that describe the kinds of oppression and injustice that is perpetrated by nations like Babylon (2:6-19). In fact, we see almost all these sins in our world today. The practices described aren't unique to Babylon, but that's part of the point.

Given the human condition, most nations eventually become like Babylon.

This is how God's answer to Habakkuk becomes God's answer to anyone who lives in a world ruled by evil systems. But it leaves the question hanging - is God going to let this cycle, the rise and fall of Babylon-like empires go on forever?

And that question is in fact answered through Habakkuk's prayer (3:1-19).

He pleads with God to act 'now', like He has in the past in bringing down corrupt nations. He uses the exodus story of the past, to paint an image of the future exodus God will perform. When at last, he will defeat evil rulers and bring justice to all people and rescue the oppressed and the innocent. This is exactly what the book of Revelation describes.

It's this hope that enables Habakkuk to live with hopeful praise – even when everything is going from bad to worse. When we turn and open Paul's letter to the believers at Thessalonica, we see that it is this same hope that gives them strength to remain faithful.

He writes, **"... they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment."** (1 Thessalonians 1:10)

It is that faith that clings to God's faithfulness to His promises, that inspired Habakkuk to make his great affirmation of faith.

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the

pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will triumph in the Lord; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!" (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

Even if everything he relied on failed, if everything that gave stability to his life crumbled, still he'd trust the Lord. If Habakkuk were speaking today, he would say, "Though the stock market crashes, the superannuation company goes bankrupt, and the bank gets hacked, if everything I rely on falters - still I will trust in the Lord. My confidence in God will not waver."

That's where faith that praises God even in the midst of impossibility, when everything is going from bad to worse becomes evident.

That's a faith that can be 'seen' – because it is filled with hope and joy.

Application |

So, when we stand in front of a seemingly impossible rock wall', and ask ourselves how on earth are we to scale it.' We do the same as my friend James had to do – when he closely inspected the rock. We ask the Spirit of God to open our eyes, so God's secure way is made clear.

We catch sight of God's secure way in today's psalm. It is almost as though the psalmist was reminding himself of God's faithfulness as he clung from one promise to the next.

He reaches up and takes his first step: **"You are righteous, LORD, and your laws are right ... they are fully trustworthy."** (119:137-138)

And when he is surrounded by trouble and distress, it is through holding onto God's promises, that he finds strength and joy to keep going (119:143).

And when doubts start to rise up and he becomes **"overwhelmed with indignation over how the ungodly disregard God's word"** (v140), he reminds himself that it is **"through trusting in God's wisdom that understanding comes."** (v144)

Finally, Habakkuk shouts his great affirmation of faith by saying,

"Yahweh my Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like those of a deer and enables me to walk on mountain heights!" (Hab. 3:19).

Even on the most treacherous rocky terrain, God's promises never fail.

That's why, just like my best friend's son, we too can learn how to find the experience of climbing walls of impossibility a joy and a thrill that makes others stagger and wonder "I just don't know how they do it!".

But we know – it is by faith, and faith alone.