

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Sunday closest to November 2



Proper 26
Year C
RCL

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4
Psalm 119:137-144
Luke 19:1-10

The Collect

The Collect

Almighty and merciful God, it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and

reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God,
now and for ever. *Amen.*

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw.

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not listen?

Or cry to you “Violence!”
and you will not save?

Why do you make me see wrong-doing
and look at trouble?

Destruction and violence are before me;
strife and contention arise.

So the law becomes slack
and justice never prevails.

The wicked surround the righteous--
therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

I will stand at my watchpost,
and station myself on the rampart;
I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,
and what he will answer concerning my com-
plaint.

Then the LORD answered me and said:

Write the vision;

make it plain on tablets,
so that a runner may read it.

For there is still a vision for the appointed time;
it speaks of the end, and does not lie.

If it seems to tarry, wait for it;
it will surely come, it will not delay.

Look at the proud!

Their spirit is not right in them,
but the righteous live by their faith.

Psalm 119:137-144

Justus es, Domine

137 you are righteous, O LORD, *
and upright are your judgments.

138 You have issued your decrees *
with justice and in perfect faithfulness.

139 My indignation has consumed me, *
because my enemies forget your words.

140 Your word has been tested to the uttermost, *
and your servant holds it dear.

141 I am small and of little account, *
yet I do not forget your commandments.

142 Your justice is an everlasting justice *
and your law is the truth.

143 Trouble and distress have come upon me, *
yet your commandments are my delight.

144 The righteousness of your decrees is everlasting; *
grant me understanding, that I may live.

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and

said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

SERMON

From Wikipedia:

Abū Bakr al-Baghdadi was the Iraqi-born leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The group has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United Nations, as well as by the European Union and many individual states. In June 2014, he was chosen as the caliph of the Islamic State.

Baghdadi was directly involved in atrocities and human rights violations conducted by ISIL. These include genocide of Yazidis in Iraq, extensive sex slavery, organized rape, floggings, and systematic executions. He directed terrorist activities and massacres. He embraced brutality as part of the organization's propaganda efforts, producing videos displaying mass crucifixions, sex slavery and executions via hacking, stoning, and burn-

ing.

On 27 October 2019, he killed himself and two children by detonating a suicide vest during the Barisha raid conducted by Delta Force, in Syria's northwestern Idlib Province¹

Genocide, sex slavery, organized rape, floggings, and systematic executions, mass crucifixions and executions via hacking, stoning, and burning. I'm revolted! The voice of Habakkuk cries out to me, ironically, from Seventh Century BC Iraq, al-Bagh-dadi's homeland:

Why do you make me see wrong-
doing
and look at trouble?

I sense we're all on the same page. We're supposed to speak good of the dead, and all I can

¹ Wikipedia

come up with is, “He’s dead. Good.” I warn you, church. We need to look more deeply into this, or we shall lead ourselves to perdition. As evil as Baghdadi’s actions were, he was a child of God. No, I can not accept the idea that he was a child of the devil. I can’t give the devil that much credit. That’s just another way we divide the world into “us” and “them”. There is only one creator God. As evil as his actions were, he was a child of God and we must ask, with Habakkuk,

Why do you make me see
wrong-doing
and look at trouble?

To answer Habakkuk’s question, I would suggest that it is only when we clearly witness wrong-doing that we can see clearly what flawed creatures

we are, for ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, however much we protest with the Pharisee from last Sunday's passage who prayed:

'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.'

Baghdadi hated us and worked for our destruction, but we returned hatred for hatred, destruction for destruction, while assuring ourselves that our actions are righteous because they sprang from the purest impulses. Poppycock! An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and the whole world winds up blind and toothless.

Here's the thing I want you to remember: no one ever did ANYTHING just to further the cause of evil. No one. We all, even Baghdadi, imagine that

our actions are justified and righteous and we're all wrong about that. We insist that WE are righteous but that the forces of evil are so powerful, we must do evil in return to secure the victory of righteousness over the forces of evil. The capacity of the human mind to construct good reasons to do bad things is limitless.

We cling to this notion because it excuses all the evil hidden within us. It is how we bamboozle ourselves. We shout, “Praise God and pass the ammunition” while imagining that God approves. Our God cannot be bamboozled. Our God is a radical God. In Abū Bakr al-Baghdadi we have an opportunity to see clearly just how radical for do we not read in Proverbs:

Do not gloat when your enemy falls;
when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice,²

And

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat;
if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.³

Did not Jesus teach in the Sermon on the mount:

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies...

How do we do that? He was a monster! Even in his death by suicide he took two children with him. I'm revolted beyond my ability to express it. His reported actions violate every concept of decency

² Proverbs 24:17

³ Proverbs 25:21

which I hold dear. Mass crucifixions? How can I embrace such a monster in love? From my human perspective, I cannot see a way to follow the teaching of my Lord so I must either reject the words of Jesus or find a new perspective, just as Zacchaeus did.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

Zacchaeus has made a good start. He recognizes that our very human assumptions about our own righteousness blind him to the teachings of Jesus. The world teaches that evil must be resisted to the

death — and thus do we grant to ourselves permission to do great evil. Jesus offers a different teaching. Zacchaeus must climb above the noise of his culture’s self-righteousness to see Jesus, just as we all must do. Nevertheless, the teachings of the world have a strong hold on him. How does he treat his life-changing encounter with Jesus? He invents some comfortable wiggle room.

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”

“**IF** I have defrauded anyone”?? **IF**? He’s a very wealthy tax collector for the Romans. Everything he does is contrary to Jewish law and constitutes fraud. He got a good look at Jesus. He has accepted

the teaching of Jesus as it applies to others, but now come the weasel words. **IF** I have defrauded. We cut ourselves slack by choosing to view the evil we do as forced upon us in response to the evil of others, not something of our own even though the testimony of history clearly teaches otherwise. From the genocide of the indigenous peoples, to slavery, to the Trail of Tears, to the Jim Crow south, even to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we stubbornly refuse to own the evil within. I can't say whether Baghdadi had to die. That's above my pay grade. I can, however, speak against the idea that his death is to be celebrated.

We watch the video of the attack which resulted in his death from the comfort of our couch and cel-

celebrate the death of this child of God, assuring ourselves that we have succeeded in expunging evil from our world. We have done no such thing. It is not the evil in the world which should concern us, in any event. It is, rather, the evil within, the evil which we refuse to own, the evil that convinces us that we are justified in doing great evil in defense of righteousness that should alarm us. Only when we confess the evil within us can we stop seeing others as enemies and spread God's unconditional love throughout His creation. Until then, our prayers are as false as that of the Pharisee from last Sunday

'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like

this tax collector.'

You appear here faithfully every Sunday. You return grace before meals. You do charitable work through the week and strive to live blameless lives, but until you confess that the evil which lurks within lurks within you as well you cannot come to see even those as evil as Baghdadi as children of God. Only with God's intercession can you do that.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

God loves you, not because of your goodness, but in spite of your unrighteousness. Never doubt that. You cannot earn God's love. But God's love cannot work change within you until you own the evil within you and ask His help.

I come and stand at every door
But none can hear my silent tread
I knock and yet remain unseen
For I am dead, for I am dead

I'm only seven, although I died
In Hiroshima long ago
I'm seven now, as I was then -
When children die, they do not grow

My hair was scorched by swirling flame;
My eyes grew dim, my eyes grew blind
Death came and turned my bones to dust

And that was scattered by the wind⁴

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be
gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and
give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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⁴ Hiroshima Child - Poem by Nazim Hikmet