

We, Christian people must be on call

Lesson: Heb 10:19-39

Hab 2,1-4

"Prices have gone up again... everything is getting more and more expensive, and you have to calculate when and where you can save a little..." "It's raining again! It's not enough that the seat of my bike keeps getting wet, I can't even go out on foot without the wind breaking my umbrella..." "The train is late again. It's unbelievable that they can't arrive on time, and I have to stand here in the wind and rain, and I'm going to miss the connection!" Are you familiar with sentences like this? Complaining has become the lifeblood of modern man. We complain about everything we can. We complain about the government, about the country's leadership, perhaps after the latest astonishing election results. We complain about our financial situation. We complain about our environment, our homes and our neighbourhoods. We complain about the services provided by various companies. We tell them to family and friends, but we also tell them to strangers, if we happen to have a few minutes to chat to someone in the corner shop or the market. The interesting thing about complaints is that the person complaining thinks they are always right. We ourselves always feel justified in our complaint. Yet, perhaps we need to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate complaints. After all, there are some things we cannot change. There are situations over which we have no control. There are small things that seem to others to be nothing, perhaps only bothering us, and it is worth taking a moment to step back and consider whether it is worth ruining our own well-being over such a small thing.

There are also legitimate complaints, in situations where it is not the complaint that is making our lives miserable, but something more serious. "I am mocked in my own congregation, talked about behind my back, the gossip has come back to me and it hurts me" "My children have turned away from me, I am left alone, no phone calls - I am lonely" "The illness is getting worse, the end is imminent, and I wanted to live much longer!" - we also perceive that these are somewhat more serious situations, and if it is possible to distinguish between a complaint and a grievance, then such complaints are more significant.

If we were to rank the complaint of the prophet Habakkuk, it would fall into this category. The book of Habakkuk is essentially a dialogue between God and the prophet. In chapter 1, the prophet complains: a threatening enemy is approaching Judah, the people are in danger, the enemy is coming towards the people with violence. "How long must I cry out, Lord, why won't you listen?" (Hab 1:2) - we read the prophet's lamentations at the very opening of the book. But the prophet turns to God with his complaint. We rarely do so - perhaps we rarely say that we complain to God. To Him we must not, He is omnipotent, He is omniscient. Many people are averse to complaining to God. He is above us - what if He gets angry? What if He runs out of patience with all the complaining? But look at Habakkuk - in the most natural way possible, he turns to God with his complaint and looks to Him for help. It is not a sin to complain to God. In fact, if anyone is worth complaining to, it is God. But what happens after the complaint? That's what today's passage is about.

Now let's look at what the Scriptures teach about how to complain, or more accurately relate to God in an unjust situation. How do we get an answer from God? Because that is the big question. How can God help me? How will he save me? In today's verse, the prophet describes how he received an answer to his complaint, and how and how this can help us to navigate life in this way too.

1. On call

The passage begins with the prophet defining his situation, giving a description of the situation. It is worth observing where we see this man. The basic situation is that Judah is being destroyed by an enemy. The foreign nations are approaching threateningly. What could the prophet have done? He could have hidden in a sheltering building in a secluded part of the city. If he was afraid, that might be a good option. Or he could have prepared for battle - he doesn't expect any answers, he knows his patriotic duty, and something will come up, he'll do his job. But no. The prophet, after he has finished his words to God, says, "I will stand at my watch, I will stand on the rampart, I will listen, waiting to see what he will say to me and what he will answer to my complaint." (Hab 2:1) Not in a secluded place, not even in the midst of battle - **the prophet goes to a place where he is sure to hear God's voice, but he waits to act until he understands and hears it.**

We tend to go for both options. Sometimes we complain to God, and at the same time we bury ourselves in our own sorrow and bitterness. Or the other option is to plunge straight into the thick of things. It's true that God exists, it's true that he may hear what we say – but it's better not to wait for him, better that we humans do things our own way and solve our problems. By contrast, the word suggests that our task should be, in fact, a kind of watchman, or we might translate it as our watch. The word on call is perhaps familiar to us from the medical, hospital environment. The doctor on call is the one whose job it is to sit there in the hospital at a given time and wait for when patients need help: whether it's an emergency or a patient already in hospital who is unwell. But the doctor on call knows that he is there, knows that he has to watch for every tremor, and knows that his job is not superfluous - there will certainly be a point when someone calls him, when he has something to do and has to do his job.

We Christian people are such people on call in this world. We need to be watchful in matters of our own lives: when we find ourselves in a hopeless situation, we need to listen to every God-given opportunity, every encouragement from the Word, every person who offers help. But it is not just their individual lives that are affected. We are also stewards of the world. When the world complains, when the world weeps under the weight of injustice, the devastation of war, the coming of the end culminating in natural disasters, we Christian people must be on call. Watchful of the purity of the gospel, vigilant of what God is saying to the world.

Another interesting aspect of this passage is that the prophet is waiting to see how God will respond to his complaint. But here, under "answer," the text actually implies something like this - what God says in response to his complaint. We should also be prepared for the fact that God does not always respond in the way we would expect - sometimes he will

argue with us, sometimes he will hold us to account, sometimes he will contradict us. We need to be ready for that too. Because that has its own beauty, and it is beautiful! We humans cannot always manage our own lives because we do not see the bigger picture. But God sees it, and the prophet knows it well.

Lord, argue with me. Lord, bring me to my senses. Tell me whether my complaint is just or unjust. Thy will be done.

2. With God

And God answers the prophet. But it is interesting that he does not give a specific answer: *"Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets."* I imagine this situation as someone dictating a will on his deathbed. It's a little different today, but in the movies there are often scenes like this. The dying old man or woman lying in bed says to the lawyer in an imperative voice: Please write! He hasn't said anything yet, but he always starts his speech like that. It's because he knows it's a moment of no return, when every word and every minute counts. Words carry weight. That is why God emphasizes it to the prophet. Every word has weight. When God speaks, we don't have to consider whether what God says is useful to us or not. No! Every single word of God has weight. Even if we do not experience God speaking literally today, His words are recorded in Scripture. And we even like to pick and choose from them. We say that there are words that speak to us and there are words that do not. But every single word of God has weight. And it is no accident when and how He speaks to us. – He makes us relate.

So once we are on call, we need to pay attention to the instructions. The prophet had to write them down – so that he could pass them on to others. So that whoever reads it will surely read it and it will make a difference in their lives. When God speaks to us, it is usually not just us. The prophets knew this, God had a message for all the people, and they wrote it down. We would expect personal answers, for God to respond to our specific situation. *What does God say when I quarrel with my husband/wife? What does God say when I am threatened by my detractors when they gossip about me? What does he say when I have financial problems?* We would like personal, heartfelt, individual answers. But that is not how God responds, and it is not how He has usually responded. And that can actually be a blessing for us.

God is the only certain point in our lives. What he says is already decided, it is already unquestionable. It is certain to come to pass. And we should expect and desire nothing more than that. We don't need to hope for personal messages - we are much more encouraged by the fact that God has left us a message for the whole world, and it applies to us too. How reassuring it is that in an ever-changing and turbulent world, God is always eternal, he does not change, he does not go back on his word, he is faithful to those who follow him. Our task is to write this on the tablets of our lives and hearts - **so that the world can see it.**

3. With a message of encouragement

And after the long wait and the "divine stalling", here are God's encouraging words. *"The presumptuous man is not of a sincere spirit, but the righteous man lives by his faith."* God is not saying that the war will be over in, say, 23 days. He does not say that here or there a decisive

blow will be struck against the enemy. No. God is giving the people an eternal testimony that will be a steadfast hold for them in this difficult time.

The righteous man will live by faith - **that's you**. The people of Judah. And that is us, the Christian people of today, justified in Jesus Christ. The enemy changes, but the covenant of God is everlasting. And even when everyone is against us, God's encouraging word is still with us. With whom? With the righteous people. Can we call ourselves righteous? Not by force of will. But the people of Judah were righteous because they were God's people. And we are righteous because we are Christ's people - and because we have known the truth. That's why we heard in the order of the reading from Hebrews: *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left"* Such is the righteous man of God - not perfect, but taking care of certain things, taking care of his deeds, his actions, and proclaiming God's grace.

It's not easy being on call. We'd rather be the ones complaining to the people on call. But in a crying world, we have a responsibility to stand guard - not to be the complainers, but to be the resolvers. With God's witness. As righteous people. Amen.

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