

Bible Reading: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

Year C, Pentecost 24

By Beth Barnett

Reading Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4 as a prayer for God to intervene, and a reminder that he wants us to turn back to him.

You will need:

- Chris Booth art image 'God Turns God's Back' projected on screen
- 7 old t-shirts in pale colours: in permanent marker, write one verse from the text in large letters on the back of each shirt, and in even larger letters, write "HOW LONG?" on the front. (remember to include the verse reference on the back, so you can easily work out the order).
You will need 7 volunteers to wear the t-shirts, and 7 volunteers to read out the verses on the back of each of the t-shirts. You might pair these people across generations. Those who are reading should be familiar with the verse they are reading, rather than trying to read it fresh from the t-shirt.
- Text displayed on the screen or print copies.

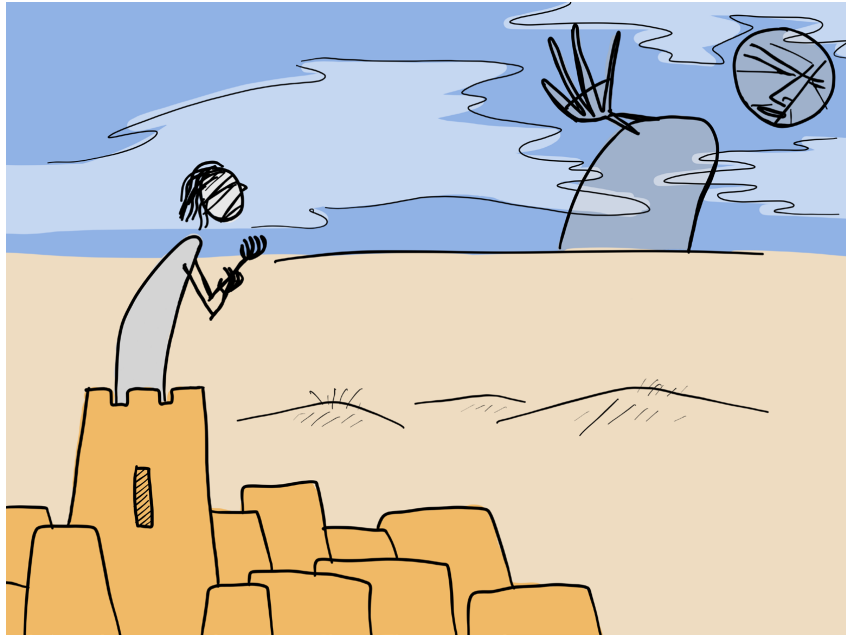
Time required:

7-10 minutes

Connect

Today we are reading from the book of the prophet Habakkuk. He looks out on the City and he is appalled, disturbed and grieved by what he sees. Violence and injustice are everywhere.

Context



Habakkuk wonders if God has seen?

Habakkuk wonders if God has turned his back on his people and is looking the other way.

Habakkuk calls out to God and asks “How long?”

“How long do I have to keep praying before you do something? Are you listening or have you turned your back on us?”

So we are going to read this text from the backs of some of our friends.

Content

Invite the 14 volunteers – the 7 t-shirt wearers and their readers – to stand in a line (in the correct order) with their backs to the gathering. Each reader reads in turn, along the line. Once the verse has been read, the t-shirt wearer turns 180 degrees to face the gathering.

When the entire passage has been read out:

As we read Habakkuk’s cries of distress, and God’s response, we realise that God hasn’t turned his back – he sees and hears and is saying “I’m onto it, just wait...”

We realise that it is God’s people who have turned their backs on God. Not the other way around.

When we say 'How long?' to God, we hear him saying it back to us – “How long until you turn back to me, turn back to the ways of justice, to the ways of mercy, to the ways of peace, to the ways of healing, to the ways of wholeness...?”

We are going to read the passage again, as we did before. But this time, let's add our voices to Habakkuk's prayer and God's response. When each person turns and we see the front of their shirt, let's join together and respond 'How long?'

Repeat the reading as above, adding and encouraging the group response 'How long?'

Consequence

Whatever we see in our world, however long it takes for justice to come and things to be put to right, we know that God has not turned away.

Perhaps you can pray this little two word prayer 'How long?' through this week as you notice, like Habakkuk did, and see:

Violence

Wrong-doing

Trouble

Destruction and violence

Strife and contention

The Law becoming slack

Justice never prevails

Wickedness

Judgement is perverted

Let's practice this two word prayer together – How long?

(together) How long? Amen.



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