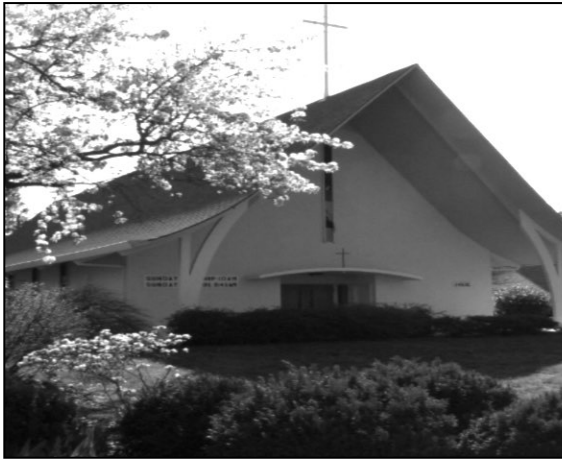




Pentecost 17

October 5, 2025

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

**THE LESSONS: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4;
Psalm 37:1-9; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke
17:5-10**

THE SERMON: “Let Go...Let God...”

Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

I know that several of you have been to Hawaii and have probably visited the Pali Lookout, a steep cliff about 1000 feet down on the windward side of the island of Oahu. Because of its location huge gusts of wind would blow through the pass between two mountains. At an evening church service in Hawaii, Rev. Danny Yamashiro told us about a huge gust that caused him to lose balance and he fell off the Pali and plummeted down some 300 feet grabbing at branches in fall and miraculously survived and was rescued. He then told a joke about an atheist who had also fallen off the Pali but was able to grab a branch fifty feet down. When he realized he couldn't hang for long, he began yelling, hoping that someone up at the lookout had noticed that he had fallen. But, because it was a rainy day, there was no one. He frantically yelled, “Help! Is anyone up there?” He was about to give up when he heard a voice. “You down there, can you hear me?” The atheist frantically answered, “Yes, yes! I can hear you. I'm down here!” And the voice responded “I know, I can see you.” And, the atheist called back, “Who are you? Can you help me?” And, the voice answered, “I am the Lord and I can help you.” Then, the atheist promised, “God, please help me! If, you'll get me out of here, I'll stop sinning and believe. I'll serve You for the rest of my life.” Then, God answered back, “You don't have to make any promises to me. Let's get you off from there; then we can talk. Here's what I want you to do. Listen carefully.” The victim yelled back, “I'll do anything, but please hurry I can't hold on much longer.” Then, God said, “Okay, let go of the branch. Just

trust me. Let go.” There was a long silence and the desperate man thought and thought and he finally yelled, “HELP! HELP! IS ANYONE ELSE UP THERE?” Of course, this was a joke, but Pastor Yamashiro made the point that, as members of Alcoholics Anonymous know when life is out of control, the turning point in their recovery is when they can “let go and let God” be in control. But, most of us can’t let go. We can’t trust God and let go of our worries and problems; so we try to find solutions on our own. But, as Woody Allen often said, “If you want to hear God laugh, just tell God your plans.”

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

But, sometimes, when life seems out of control, we complain to God, as Tevye did in the 1971 movie “Fiddler on the Roof.” That’s pretty much what the prophet Habakkuk is doing in our first lesson. We know that, socially and religiously, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was experiencing severe moral and spiritual decay during Habakkuk’s prophecy. Judah was marked by widespread injustice, idolatry, and complacency. Habakkuk’s prophecy to Judah unfolds against a backdrop of national crisis: the Northern Kingdom had already fallen and an impending Babylonian invasion was mounting. That’s when the prophet complains to God, “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... therefore judgment comes forth perverted.” I don’t know about you, but to me, it seems that the Judah Habakkuk saw - wrong-doing, trouble, destruction, violence, strife, division, lawlessness, and injustice prevailing - is the world today. Then, the Lord spoke to Habakkuk, “... For there is still a vision for the appointed time... 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.” God has a plan. Let go and let God!

Psalms 37

Habakkuk may be echoing what David said almost 400 years before in our psalm. Who says history doesn’t repeat itself? David advises, “Do not be provoked by evildoers; do not be jealous of those who do wrong... Do not be provoked by the one who prospers, the one who succeeds in

evil schemes. Refrain from anger, leave rage alone; do not be provoked; it leads only to evil. For evildoers shall be cut off..." David also urges, "Put your trust in the Lord and do good... Take delight in the Lord, who shall give you your heart's desire. Commit your way to the Lord... and see what God will do... Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently; Do not be provoked by... the one who succeeds in evil schemes. Refrain from anger, leave rage alone; do not be provoked; it leads only to evil. For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord shall possess the land." So, even though it seems like a losing battle and it's so easy to just give up, David urges us, "Put your trust in the Lord and do good..." so that we may "dwell in the land and find safe pasture." But, it's hard to believe this when all you can see is the darkness and chaos like Habakkuk saw in Judah. Most of us don't have the faith of David who endured so much adversity in his life - the jealousy of King Saul, his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, the treachery of his own son Absalom. Even though he wasn't perfect, David still trusted in God.

Luke 17:5-10

When Jesus tells his imperfect disciples that if they cause someone to sin, they should have a giant millstone tied around their necks and be thrown into the sea. They know they failed to live up to God's perfection; so, they cry out, "Increase our faith!" And, Jesus tells them, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." Basically, Jesus tells them that faith isn't some commodity that some people could have more than others. I know many Christians think like that, but it's blatantly wrong. Faith is faith. When it appears that some Christians have more faith than others, it simply means that they are living out their faith more than others. Faith is not small or big. How you exercise your faith is what is big or small. That's why Jesus adds that illustration about the slave doing what a slave would do. Jesus is saying that, when we do good, we shouldn't have to think how much we are doing; we just do what we do because it's who we are. But, there are times when we are challenged. Like the father whose son was experiencing convulsions and Jesus told him, "Simply believe!" And, the father replied, "I believe, help me in my unbelief!" Despite his unbelief, the father's son was healed. God didn't focus on his unbelief; God acted because he had faith. So, as

AA teaches, “Let go and let God” change your perspective so you can see hope and a new future.

2 Timothy 1:1-14, The Call and the Challenge

More times than not, we are like that father and not like Paul who endured so much hardship. But, we shouldn't be tempted to compare our faith with Paul. That's what he's trying to teach Timothy in this second letter, "... I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord... relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling..." God is with us in every circumstance and God changes us, but God may not change our life situations. Faith helps us to see a future. As, Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians, "(God) will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure." God doesn't want us to fail. Jesus keeps telling us, "I have come to bring life." So, Paul encourages Timothy, "Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard... in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us." Let go and let God shine in your life. As we stress stewardship this month, I hope you'll see an aspect of your stewardship is to take care of people: yourselves, your family, your friends, your church. Like Habakkuk saw, the world seems to be a toilet waiting for God to flush it. But, Jesus wants us to have a faith to change the world by taking care of each other - a faith strong enough to "let go and let God" be in control. As we focus on stewardship this month, our lessons remind us with God all things are possible. With all the problems in the world around us, it's so easy to want to give up. But, Paul told Timothy that God doesn't give us a spirit of cowardice but a spirit of power. In such a time like this, our hymn this morning reminds us that God in Christ is our firm foundation. We don't have to be afraid or dismayed by the troubles of the world for God is with us. So, when fiery trials in our pathways lie, God will supply His grace to sustain us. And, Habbakkuk promises that God has a vision for the world and, although it seems to tarry, it will happen in God's time. Until then, trust that God is with us...