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"I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart." (Habakkuk 2:1)

Let us pray [a prayer written by Bishop Charles Henry Brent]. O God, whose low sweet song of love is never silent in the souls of men, make us skilled to hear the music of thy counsels that vibrating with thy message we may learn to sing thee in tones of freedom and responsive joy and so complete the antiphony that draws earth within the gates of heaven's choir through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I have never preached an ordination sermon before, Tim, so I'm unclear if I can preach one at my usual length, or if I should keep it to a short 45 minutes. I've also never preached on Habakkuk, but we're going to do it anyway. So, I don't exactly know what's about to happen, but we're all going to go on this journey together. As we hear in chapter two of this prophet of Jerusalem from the 600s BC writing this phrase, "I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart. I will keep watch to see what God will say to me and what God will answer concerning my complaint."

Now, Habakkuk was called by God to the rampart, that part of the city wall of Jerusalem, the wall that protected the city of Jerusalem and the people inside. Of course, the ramparts are part of that fortification up on top. There he is, standing at the very pinnacle of the top story of the city of Jerusalem.

Now, one of the fantastic things about the ramparts of the city walls is that they're still there. I've been up on them myself. If you go to Jerusalem, and I was last there in 2023, a few months before the October 7 conflict broke out, if you find the right guy and you have 25 shekels, they will let you go up onto the walls of the city to walk around the modern city of Jerusalem around and to then turn inside to see the ancient old city that is there still.

So here's what you saw if you climb up that wall: We were there in the springtime. It was Lent. It was Ramadan. On the very top of the Damascus Gate, you look out at the modern city and as the sun was setting, the lights were turning on as the Muslims of the city were breaking their fast. You hear the call to prayer and then the food carts come out because the fast is broken and everybody comes to buy dates and pancakes and candy and everything else. You can see strings of lights across the city and it's like a Christmas party outside. It's a street festival and that is going on outside that you can see from the walls as you look down.

Of course you can also see inside the old city of Jerusalem which is still an active city. You can look down and see the bustle in the marketplaces where they're selling fruits and vegetables and tea and spices. You can look down and see the tiny little churches and

mosques that are tucked into every single corner. You can look inside and see schools and playgrounds. You can even speak a little bit with the children who are playing soccer and have a few words to share back and forth.

Because here's the thing about being called to the ramparts: the rampart on the wall is a border. It is a meeting place of the outside and the inside, the exterior and the interior. It is a place where you are accessible to everyone. You are accessible to all sides. That rampart is the place where God has called Habakkuk.

So it says in here that Habakkuk wants “to see what [God] will say to me, and what [God] will answer concerning my complaint.” The whole first chapter is Habakkuk's complaint. He stands up on the wall looking outward and sees the armies of Chaldea in a siege. He is one of the only prophets where the prophet directly just yells at God and he says, "Why is there so much violence? What are you going to do, God, about this violence in the world? What are you going to do?" And he complains and laments for what he sees from the ramparts.

Habakkuk is trying to interpret the signs of the times, all the moments happening in the world around him. As he laments, he says, first of all, “How on earth could God bring an army to come against the good people of Jerusalem? How could God bring an army against the chosen people? How could God bring this to the righteous good people in the city?”

Then he turns around and looks inside the city. There he does not see things that are good and righteous. What was inside was actually pretty bad no matter where he went. And he asks, “So what happened to these good and righteous people in here? Oh. Oh no. Oh no.” Oh, inside the city there's predatory lending that is victimizing the poor. He goes on to say in chapter two that there's violence. There is hoarding of wealth so that some have too much and some have not enough. There is also sexual exploitation of the vulnerable.

So Habakkuk prays and asks God, “Help me with a word about the outside. Help me to bring a word to those who are inside.”

It's so significant that God has called this prophet to the rampart instead of the temple. Habakkuk was not called to the priestly service of the temple. There were enough priests and the city was still in a mess. (Let that be a lesson to those of us who are called to priestly service.) But instead, God called this prophet to the ramparts. And when God calls someone to the ramparts, today the church says God has called a deacon.

A deacon is a person who God has called to the ramparts. In a few minutes, we're going to hear the examination that the bishop will read to us from the Prayer Book to tell us the ministry of the deacon in two parts. When we get to that page we will hear the words “you are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those

among whom you live, and work, and worship." Someone who is on that rampart, who is there on the border of those city walls, is available to those who are suffering both inside and outside. That someone is in position to bring a word of Christ and a word of redemptive love to those that the institutional church is poorly positioned to serve. There are people we do not reach out to well and so we need someone on top of the walls accessible to all.

The bishop will also say in a moment that the deacon is "to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world." The ministry that any deacon does, a ministry not of the temple service of the priests, but one who is on the ramparts, who lives on the border, accessible to people outside of the institutional church are then asked to come back to their place inside the church at the pulpit to be able to tell stories that I don't know and that I cannot tell. So God calls a deacon. We need a prophet on the ramparts because we need to hear those stories that are hard to bring into the church any other way.

So the end of this prophet's short three chapters in the scriptures, I love it because it tells us what is the result and the fruit of God's rampart ministry, of God's diaconal ministry. First of all, we began with the prophet's lamentation about the world, with the sadness and heartbreak of violence, of injustice, of exploitation and the predatory lending and everything else.

The prophet begins with that lamentation and then, by bringing these things to God, the prophet brings us to the wonderful part of the Bible, my most favorite word in the Bible, it brings us to the prophetic "but." The prophetic "but" comes in after all that we have seen and lamented in the world, then God will then act and then there is the "but" in chapter 2:14, Habakkuk says, "But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

By the ministry of one on the ramparts, who brings the stories here, who brings these lamentations in prayer to God, that our minds and our souls together will all expand with new knowledge about the God of our understanding.

Then, in chapter 2:20, again it says, "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!" That the Lord is in his holy temple, that for all of the things we saw in this city just a moment ago: the exploitation, the injustices, all of the things that lament, God was still there, God did not abandon and God did not give up.

That here on the border of Advent and Christmas, it is still the God Emmanuel, God who is with us. That God is with us despite what we have seen, what we have done, who we have been. There was a God who was there all along.

And the last verse in chapter 2:11, “The very stones will cry out from the wall.” This is a verse that later on Jesus picks up and says on Palm Sunday that the very stones will cry out. Here on the stony wall of the ramparts of the city of Jerusalem, the stones themselves there is a sign of revival and praise and hope that happens when we bring out laments and complaints to God, by seeing the world outside and the world within, by bringing the Word in, by bringing the prayers up, there is hope and revival and praise and worship. The stones cry out themselves. That the city itself is a character in the story. That stony hearts become once again changed and transformed.

Now, here's the place where I have lied to you because every good preacher should at least be honest enough to tell where he has lied to you. I said the ramparts of the city are still there. Not really. I mean, the walls that Habakkuk stood on are 600 something BC are long gone. It was a couple of years later that those Chaldeans, those Assyrians and Persians took the walls down and destroyed the city. But the walls that are there now, the walls of the old city would later be rebuilt.

Today, we can actually see in the walls the different layers of the construction that have happened over centuries. So there's a layer of a wall that was built under King Herod. Later on there was a Roman wall built on top of it. Later on the Crusaders built a layer and the Ottomans and the Egyptians came through and built their layers. This is all to say that in every generation there is a wall, in every generation there's a rampart, in every generation, there is still a God who calls people to come up to the rampart. God still calls people to come and the world in a way that nobody else can and then to bring that inside to the church community to tell the stories that need to be told to the people of God so that prayers can be offered and that out of all of that prophetic lamentation, God might transform all of it with a glorious prophetic “but.”

In every generation, God keeps coming down into the city to find someone to call up on that rampart. A ministry that, in here, in this moment, in this time, God will call the ministry of another deacon. And so, Tim, come up to this altar rail and take your place on the rampart.