



# ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

## Episcopal Church & Student Center

1309 R Street \* Lincoln, NE 68508 \* (402) 474-1979 \* [www.stmarks-episcopal.org](http://www.stmarks-episcopal.org)

The Rev. Deacon Ryan Hall, Curate  
Sermon for the 19th Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 22  
St. Mark's on the Campus  
October 7, 2007

OT: <a href="#">Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4</a>	<a href="#">Psalm 37:1-10</a>	Epistle: <a href="#">2 Timothy 1:1-14</a>	Gospel: <a href="#">Luke 17:5-10</a>
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“What Time Is It? I would open my sermon today with an open ended question, “*What time is it?*” Let's look at the events as I understand them to help us unravel this question. The time appears to be one of great turmoil in many parts of the world.

Some would say it is a time of fear:

- Genocide going on in some parts.
- There is hunger and fear of famine in some parts of the world.
- Fear of a possible worldwide pandemic.

Some would say it is a time of educational progress:

- The world is changing in scientific and technological explosions.
- People find their education is quickly obsolete.

Some would say it is a time of apprehension:

- New drugs are being produced and introduced into the population.
- Many are concerned about the effect on society and young people.
- Fear of environmental catastrophes like animal extinctions.
- Fear that large corporations are exploiting 3rd world countries.

Some would say it is a time of growing dissatisfaction with all levels of government:

- Many think officials of all parties are corrupt.
- Political factions seem more partisan than ever and get nothing done.
- Many fear the government might be dragged into another protracted war.
- Some fear an economic depression due to huge government deficits.
- Groups of residents cannot get even basic voting/citizenship rights.
- Many people do not like or trust the Executive branch of government.
- Some are even calling for his removal, while others defend him.
- There have been terror plots
- The government has used the terrorism fear to enlarge its power.

In the church, some would say it is a time of schism:

- Schism and discontent are rampant.
- Bishops can't seem to agree, international meetings must be called to avert schism.
- Archbishop of Canterbury and church leaders seem helpless.
- New supplements to the prayer book threaten some.

With all this turmoil, again I ask the question, “what time is it?”

I don't know what you were thinking, but the events I was describing took place in the year 1605\*: the Gunpowder plot has just occurred, but I will return to that in a minute.

**\*For actual table correlation of time events, see italicized appendix to the sermon.**

Civil war, and what we now call genocide, was taking place between rival Shogun lords in Japan. A famine in Russia had killed 500,000 people. A localized outbreak of bubonic plague “the black death” resurfaced in London in 1601-02, killing some 33,000 people. War with France was on the horizon (again).

The Age of Exploration and the Industrial Revolution was dawning. Farmers who had grown used to the Village Green (or Village Common) suddenly had no grazing lands for their sheep. People were being replaced by machines. The new age of Exploration brought tobacco (1601) and later, the first multinational corporation, the East India Company would bring opium to the masses in London, and virtually take over India and, later, China. Animals like the Auroch (a wild ox) and the Dodo and countless native American peoples being exposed to the white man's diseases (small pox, etc.) would soon vanish from the earth.

In England, the beloved Queen Elizabeth died without an heir and her closest relative - from Scotland no less, succeeds her and becomes King. James I becomes one of the most unpopular kings in history - totalitarian tactics, bad with money, known to be a bad public speaker. And worst of all...he's the son of Mary, Queen of Scots... <gasp!> he might be a Catholic! Popery!

Parliament, likewise, is at an all time low. Graft was rampant, huge deficit spending, partisan bickering and fist fights broke out regularly on the floor of Parliament. They had even been debating whether or not to give Roman Catholics some civil rights (they couldn't even vote - and wouldn't for another 200 years).

And then, the Gunpowder Plot ended that debate. Guy Fawkes and some other Catholic conspirators are alleged to have concocted a Terrorist scheme to blow up Parliament and the Protestants in power. This was all Parliament and James I needed to establish dictatorial powers. Some historians even debate whether or not James I conspired to create the whole Gunpowder Plot scheme as a power grab.

Even in the Church, schism was in the air. Puritans and Anglicans were battling it out over theological matters. With Queen Elizabeth gone, new addenda to the BCP were being squeaked in, alarming traditionalists. James I even had to call the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 to avert schism between the Puritans and the Anglicans over what it means to be baptized and who can perform a baptism (only ministers or laity) and who can excommunicate whom. About the only thing he got the Bishops to agree on was a resolution to “exterminate the Jesuits.”

So I come back to my question, “What time is it?”

It's been over 400 years, but we live in a time oddly similar to 1605. We modern people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century don't want to believe that, but it is true. We have seen in the last ten years many of the same heart rending events: Terrorist attacks, protracted wars, governmental economic problems, natural disasters like the Tsunami or the New Orleans Hurricane a few years back. The list, unfortunately, goes on and on.

In the church, conflict remains, just over a different question. There has been both squabbling and hostility within both the Episcopal church and the Anglican Communion all over the world. In fact, the House of Bishops just concluded a meeting responding to a Communique that the other Primates of the Anglican Communion have sent to the American HOB. The more cynical part of me (I am of English descent after all!) would suggest that there is some truth to the old saying that “The more things change, the more they stay the same...”

In the OT reading we received today, the time is the year 605 BC, a thousand years before our friends in England, circa 1605. We heard a somewhat choppy reading from the prophet Habakkuk today, which is unfortunate because I think the reading in its entirety wrestles with this very question. Habakkuk, who quite possibly has one of the funniest names in the entire bible. Habakkuk... makes me feel like I have been verbally assaulted.

Habakkuk lived in the southern kingdom of Judah (the Northern kingdom had already fallen) on the brink of invasion. Habakkuk, with a lot of the same fears that both the people in 1605 and today have, his time was corrupt and full of fear as well. Habakkuk poses two interesting questions to God, and God responds both times, but not in ways Habakkuk expects. Habakkuk first complains about the injustice going on within the Kingdom of Judah, and why isn't God doing anything about it? As Habakkuk sits pouting on a rampart, God answers by saying he is sending the Chaldeans (i.e. The Babylonians), a foreign army will conquer and right the injustices.

God's answer seems to be that Judah loses its independence as it is conquered by a foreign army. Not exactly the answer Habakkuk was hoping for. So, Habakkuk backtracks but still finds a way to complain again (the second complaint was not read in the lectionary reading): “Wait a minute...we're bad, but we're not *that* bad.” Habakkuk complains that such justice will require the Kingdom of God to fall. Again God gives an answer that was not what Habakkuk was hoping for, “The Righteous will live by their faith.”

Sounds simple enough, does it not? If you just have enough faith... I am sure all of us who have grown up in or within arm's reach of the church have heard this one before, and I think we all know that it's more complicated than that.

Again I ask the question that I have been raising: *What time is it?*

We live in a very materialistic time. We are fed messages over and over again throughout the day that if we just had more, then we would be happy. I think we've been so conditioned by those messages about getting more, that when we hear the readings today, we naturally assume that the message is about getting *more* faith. If we just got *more* faith, we'd be as happy as those models we see in ads and on billboards.

In light of this materialistic time we live in, regardless of whatever our personal opinions on such matters are, the readings for today are all stressing a very central point: we are called to live by faith. We are, after all, a community of faith. We also live in a time of great questions about God. There have been some best sellers like *The God Delusion*, which you may have read or heard about. It has always been chic in some intellectual circles to bash people who do have faith. Sometimes those people have valid criticisms and sometimes they just devolve into name-calling.

In our gospel reading today, the apostles...even *the* apostles...are begging Jesus for more faith. One would think if anyone did not need *more* faith, it would be the apostles who knew the Lord Jesus personally. But even they felt like they needed “more faith” as if *more faith* would solve all their problems and questions

about God and the universe we live in. If the Apostles of our Lord had stretches where they did not have enough faith all the time, where does that leave the rest of us? “If you just have more faith” has become more of a slogan these days. In and of itself “having more faith” is not all that helpful in answering the big questions of life like ‘why does God allow a Tsunami’ or ‘why did God allow The Holocaust?’

What is helpful is remembering at this time that, like Habakkuk or 1605, we have always wrestled with questions about God and His relationship with the world. Things happen in the world that we can't explain. It is not about trying to accumulate more faith, as if faith was some material thing that can be bought and sold. That is not what the lectionary is stressing at all. Faith is a gift, not a commodity. As we learn from the disciples today, everyone, even the apostles, goes through seasons where we have doubts about things. And you know what? That's okay! God isn't going to fall off his throne because we have periods where our faith is shaken. We all have periods where we feel like God isn't there. As we come to Communion this morning, let us remember that words of Paul in the epistle reading,

“For this reason 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 or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.” Amen.

### Sermon Appendix A

*[Actual correlation for discussion, but not actually read as part of the sermon:]*

<i>Genocide going on in some parts.</i>	<i>(Shogun civil war in Japan)</i>
<i>There is hunger and fear of famine in some parts of the world.</i>	<i>(Famine in Russia where 500000 died)</i>
<i>Fear of a possible worldwide pandemic</i>	<i>(Black Death epidemic of London, kills 33000)</i>
<i>The world is changing in scientific and technological explosions.</i>	<i>(Age of Exploration)</i>
<i>People find their education is quickly obsolete.</i>	<i>(Industrial revolution)</i>
<i>New drugs are being produced and introduced into the population, many are concerned about the effect on society and young people.</i>	<i>(Tobacco, 1600, Opium)</i>
<i>Fear of environmental catastrophes like animal extinctions</i>	<i>(Auroch, Dodo go extinct)</i>
<i>Fear that large corporations are exploiting 3rd world countries</i>	<i>(East India Company, 1602)</i>
<i>Closer to home, growing dissatisfaction with all levels of gov't</i>	<i>(London, circa James I)</i>
<i>Many think officials of all parties are corrupt</i>	
<i>Political factions seem more partisan than ever and get nothing done.</i>	<i>(Parliament at all time low)</i>
<i>Many fear the gov't might be dragged into another protracted war</i>	<i>(with France)</i>
<i>Some fear an economic depression due to huge gov't deficits</i>	<i>(James I inherited 400000 debt)</i>
<i>Groups of residents cannot get even basic voting/citizenship rights</i>	<i>(Catholics not allowed to vote)</i>
<i>Many people do not like or trust the Executive branch of gov't</i>	<i>(James I is not even English)</i>
<i>Some are even calling for his removal, while others defend him.</i>	
<i>There have been terror plots,</i>	<i>(Main, Gunpowder Plots)</i>
<i>The gov't has used the terrorism fear to enlarge its power</i>	<i>(Gunpowder plot reprisals against Catholics)</i>
<i>Even in the Church, schism and discontent are rampant</i>	<i>(Puritans and Anglicans)</i>
<i>Bishops can't seem to agree, international meetings must be called to avert schism.</i>	
<i>Archbishop of Canterbury and church leaders seem helpless</i>	<i>(Hampton Court Conference, 1604)</i>
<i>New supplements to the prayer book threaten some.</i>	<i>(Alexander Nowell's small catechism.)</i>