

November 2, Ordinary 31C (Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4)

We are one body, even as the world comes apart.

by [Mary Barnett](#) in the [November 2025](#) issue

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I was taught in divinity school to avoid reading the lectionary selections as a direct commentary on my time and place and instead recognize them as deeply embedded in their ancient world contexts. This was excellent advice. But sometimes these old words hit me upside the head:

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 wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack, and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous; therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

To not hear Habakkuk’s words resonate in our current context is to be purposefully deaf. But to understand what they might be saying about the nature of God and the consequences of injustice is more complicated. I climb up on the ramparts to see if I can gain a wider perspective.

I ask myself: Is it possible that the cruelty and chaos we are currently roiling in is the very instrument needed to lance the boil long festering under the surface skin of our democracy? I certainly don’t believe God is up there maliciously pulling particular strings, but I do believe we are experiencing the effects of previous causes and that something I call the Holy Spirit is involved.

What do I hear? Money. Power. I’ve loved these things and been the beneficiary of them. But I demurred. I looked away bashfully. I dissembled. I worked several hours a week for peace and equity. Played nice while winning. Was on the side of the downtrodden while simultaneously managing my investments. This is not evil, is it? No. It’s how I was taught to be good! I am also certifiably talented, honorable, hardworking, and compassionate. I care. When my government sends undocumented immigrants to South Sudan, I am outraged. I wake in the night disquieted.

When they attack Harvard, however, I take it personally. I get out of bed and write to my congressman. This is not bad, but it is instructive. What energizes me is what affects me most. So the law becomes slack, and justice for *all* never prevails. We protect our own interests—we can’t help it. It’s how God made us! I justify myself and blame God or capitalism or yesterday’s lunch or something, anything, out of my control. So much is out of my control. But Christianity asks us to be remade: to relocate ourselves inside one eternal body, each part equally precious, all of us sharing one sacred heart. My muscles resist such an existential stretch.

In the meantime, I am outraged by bad behavior. This part is easy. Our president enjoys making fun of people—not to mention recklessly dismantling what it took 200 years to build (on the backs of slaves) while he gleefully lines his own pockets. We are horrified—and thrilled, meaning that we can’t look away—as we drive

by the wreck of our democracy, lying disfigured and disabled by the side of the road, surrounded by the flashing lights of law enforcement in protective gear. Who will protect us?

Watching this destruction reminds me of watching the Who smash their guitars when I was a teenager. I did not know it was possible to destroy, so fast and so relentlessly, what I believed was so valuable. What was so full of goodness, so full of God, had to be indestructible, didn't it? Shouldn't there be laws against this?

There are. The prophet Habakkuk suggests that the pending Babylonian invasion is due to the lack of faithfulness of the Jewish people. God is not pleased. There will be hell to pay and captivity to endure. But, God assures the prophet, eventually inequity will be routed out. Justice will be restored. Righteousness before God and toward neighbor will be rewarded. But when? How? By whom? What is required of us, particularly in this modern era, when the whole world is in our backyard?

I come to my senses periodically, but still it is as if I am caught in a dream. I can't quite feel my hands and feet. Where can I stand where I am not implicated? Where can I go from your voice? I stand at my watchpost, but under my feet the blood calls out from the ground.

I wait and wait. "God's grace is most effective when we have finished our protest and outrage, and are silent," writes Bryan Spinks, and it appears to be true—because now God answers me.

Tell the truth, God says. How do you fit into this? How did your ancestors fit in? Speak from your precise location and from your body. With all your assets—your degrees, your bank account. No one will hear it correctly, as you want them to hear it. Mostly it will be heard in fragments, and the fragments will cut you and cut you off from your friends and relatives. Make it plain on tablets so even someone running by could read it. *Tax the rich*. No one has attention for more than that.

Perhaps, I say. But no one will vote for it. Besides, it will have unintended consequences. We are competitive, capitalistic. It's in our blood! You made us this way! And what about the future? What will happen?

How should I know? says God. I lay the foundations. I'm here now, with you. That's all you have to work with.

I decide to be practical: to bury my wealth in the backyard, find a better bank, invest compassionately. Surely there are worse villains.

Then I look up and feel you standing there, just out of sight. At the end of my arms, your fingers. Dirt under my fingernails. We are one body.