

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Joy amid troubles

Beijing is so modern! The exclamations kept coming from touchdown to sleep time. It all started with the new terminal 1 that opened at Beijing Airport in March: the totally clear walls of the ramp from the plane into the terminal, the fully glassed wall of the building that exposed everything from the operations and administrative centers below to the passenger area on the top floor. And then the process of walking in – one slightly domed ceiling, three-cornered, no pillars and covering all plane berths plus immigration. So open, so clear, so spacious, so uplifting.

Our guide explained that ‘bad traffic’ is when all traffic cannot move on the expressway, so we had no bad traffic, but plenty of time to observe the many types of cars, the wonderful groves of Chinese Scholar trees, a couple of shepherds out with their flocks, and apartments, apartments, apartments. Closer to downtown offices and shopping and headquarters mingled in with the condos as the streets vibrated with Chinese Rose plantings and chrysanthemums.

And the hotel. Of course we expected it to be nice, but so far, after one night of sleeping and using all the facilities – we can’t find anything to complain about. What a coup someone made with this design and furnishing!

A month ago a sandstorm turned the city yellow for a few days. A decade from now there may be no water table left above the bedrock. Somehow the summer highs of 100 and winter lows below zero make this springtime seem just perfect with all the trees in leaf and the air warming to 75 today.

Habakkuk offers the opposite situation – disaster. In Peterson’s translation – no cherry tree blossoms, no strawberries to ripen, all worm-eaten apples, wheat fields stunted, sheep pens sheepless, cattle barns empty...

...AND “I’m singing joyful praise to God. I’m turning cartwheels of joy to my Savior God. I take heart and gain strength. I run like a deer. I feel like I’m king of the mountain.”

What a strange confluence of streams! What a wild configuration of stories! What an impossible mixture of elements! Troubles and joys. Disaster and happiness. Loss and triumph. Misery and praise.

As millions in this country of China can attest, this impossible mixture is possible, these horrid opposites can be lived together. Maybe this is the place for all of us to start – is the faith we profess only ‘worth it’ when it makes us happy, makes us prosperous, makes us succeed. OR is faith something so large that it redefines success, rewrites prosperity, remakes happiness, remolds worth? Dear God, I get lost so easily in all the ‘externals’ of life. I see these externals and take them as signs of my faith or your goodness. Lead me

to you, God. Lead me to find you in, through, around, under and beyond all these signs
until I too can shout with my friend Habakkuk:

*Though the cherry trees don't blossom,...
I'm singing joyful praise to God.*