

**A Glow on the Horizon**  
**Habakkuk 1:1-4; II Timothy 1:7-12; John 15:12-17**  
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**Introduction: Sunrise**

First cup of coffee on the cottage porch just before day is breaking. Perhaps the best part of a summer's day! *Do you like the sunrise? . . . illuminating the early morning sky with its high and light clouds, those lacey clouds which are sure to melt away as the day waxes warm in a placid and balmy atmosphere?*<sup>1</sup>

**I. A Glow on the Horizon**  
**Symbol of Hope**

Before the red hot sun is pasted in the sky like a crimson wafer,<sup>2</sup> the emerging sunrise appears as *a glow on the horizon of every newborn day and as we watch the blazing orb come up to chase the dark away, we know that life is good*<sup>3</sup> because the night sweats are over and gone. Finished is our anxious, nocturnal isolation.

The glow on the horizon is a promise, a hope, a comfort, a consolation, a reassurance. The glow on the horizon is an invitation to *recall forgotten mornings when we walked through parables of sunlight*<sup>4</sup> among wildflowers in verdant green meadows. A glow on the horizon: such a symbol of hope! . . . except in the Middle East!

**Sign of Despair**

Not so in the Middle East, where a glow on the horizon blazes brilliantly as a perfidious sign of prevailing devastation and ensuing despair.

There's a glow on the horizon surrounding Haifa, Israel, and it's not a symbol of hope. There's a glow on the horizon surrounding Beirut, Lebanon, and it's not a symbol of hope. There's a glow on the horizon surrounding Hadera in Israel, Tyre in Lebanon, Tiberias in Israel, the Road to Damascus in Lebanon, surrounding the Gaza Strip, Rafah, and Khan Younis; but the glow on the horizon is not a symbol of hope, for the dream of peace in the Middle East has been deferred.

*What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? . . . Or does it explode?*<sup>5</sup> This time the dream **exploded** precisely where the missiles landed—at the marked destinations of C-802s and FAJR-3s and Katyushas and of rockets delivered with precision from sophisticated warplanes.

Echoing throughout the centuries—amidst the deafening noise of missiles and rockets, amidst the wailing of wounded children clinging to threads of life and the lamenting of mothers refusing to be consoled—comes the piercing protest of the Prophet Habakkuk: *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.*<sup>6</sup>

A contemporary of the Prophet Jeremiah in 600 B.C., Habakkuk—while complaining to God of prevalent injustice and unimaginable atrocities **within** Judah—decries the cruelty, pride, and aggression of the invading Chaldeans from Babylon. The sorrow that stirs his heart is a vast world-sorrow that grieves the fractured moral constitution of his larger world.<sup>7</sup> His voice rings out **today**: *Destruction and violence are before me. O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen?*

In these days, don't you want to fervently cry out with Habakkuk and passionately lament with the Psalmist: *Why do the nations so furiously rage together? Why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel against the Lord.*<sup>8</sup>

That's what I want to know! Why do the nations so furiously rage, so that

*Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.*

*From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.*<sup>9</sup>

The question lodged in every desperate heart is this: will the violence in the Middle East escalate into a nuclear holocaust? The fire on the horizon is so encompassing and the hatred on the ground is so intense that we fear the world will end—either in fire or in ice.

## II. The Wager of Our Generation

“The whole question,” contends Albert Camus, “is to know whether or not we shall develop faster than the rocket with a nuclear warhead. And, unfortunately, the fruits of the spirit are slower to ripen than intercontinental missiles. But, after all, since atomic (nuclear) war would divest any future of its meaning, it gives us complete freedom of action. We have nothing to lose except everything. So let’s go ahead. This is the wager of our generation. If we fail, it is better, in any case, to have stood on the side of those who choose life than on the side of those who are destroying.”<sup>10</sup>

The stakes in this unsavory, involuntary wager are astronomically high, matched only in magnitude by the immeasurable depth of the unutterable fear of our generation. Undoubtedly, in our collective perception, we are at a critical, defining moment in the history of our world.

Imagine this!—and this is neither a convenient exaggeration nor a contrived hyperbole—picture this: humanity stands on the precipice of a bottomless, nocturnal abyss. In one hand humanity holds the love of power, in the other hand, the power of love. To wield the one—the love of power—would most certainly careen us into the eternal abyss below. To employ the other, however—the power of love—could pull us back among the wild flowers in the verdant green meadows. It’s the wager of our generation.

## III. Love One Another or Perish

*This is my commandment*, said Jesus, *that you love one another as I have loved you.*<sup>11</sup> As an integral part of his farewell discourse, this commandment is issued by Jesus to his disciples during his final days with them on earth, after he has set his face toward Jerusalem and turned his countenance toward the cross. As we read his statement, it serves not only as a directive to his disciples as how they ought to live with one another, but also it coins the suitable answer to Habakkuk’s lament. 2000 years ago Jesus gave the prescription to Habakkuk’s predicament of looking at destruction and violence . . . and our predicament as well. *Love one another. Love one another. This is my commandment, that you love one another.* Note, please, that this is not an admonition, not an appeal, not an invitation, not an option, not a preference, not a request, not a suggestion. It is a command . . . a commandment, a mandate, an imperative . . . an either/or.

On September 1, 1939, leading his Third Reich forces, Hitler invaded Poland and set off World War II. The poet W.H. Auden penned his reflections on this catastrophic turning point in history:

*Waves of anger and fear  
Circulate over the bright  
And darkened lands of the earth,  
Obsessing our private lives:  
The unmentionable odour of death  
Offends the September night. . . .  
. . . no one exists alone . . .  
We must love one another or die.<sup>12</sup>  
We must love one another or perish.*

The Middle East crucible clearly indicates that we are at another potentially catastrophic turning point, and Jesus' commandment looms powerfully before us as the only imperative that can dispel the fatal vision of violence and destruction. Love one another . . . or perish. "The great tragedy of life," wrote Somerset Maugham, "is not that men (people) perish, but that they cease to love." I for one would press Maugham's observation further and contend that the **supreme** tragedy of life is that people perish **because** people cease to love.

*What does love look like?* asked St. Augustine. *It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has the eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men, (women and children). That is what love looks like.*

On June 15, Jessica Benson Kuntz, addressed her graduating classmates at Mt. Lebanon High School with an extraordinarily profound message:

*Poverty, and war and a huge wealth gap plague this world, yet many of us can walk by a homeless person on Liberty Avenue without turning our heads. . . . if we see only ourselves, what impact will we make? We must not allow ourselves to fall into that (a) dangerous state of apathy, to become the living dead. . . . complacent in the face of a wrong. . . . We are called upon to be people of impact. We cannot just be people who imagine a better world; we need to be the ones to create it . . . to impact it. . . . Do not merely accept this world we live in; shape it. Do not accept custom blindly; question it. Do not accept morality; redefine it for yourself. See life not just as how it is, but also how it ought to be and strive for that ideal.<sup>13</sup>*

There it is! Without ambiguity, without timidity, Jessica Benson Kuntz sets the challenge before us: *Choose to be people of action.* The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy an identical challenge dressed in other words and phrases: *God did not give us a spirit of cowardice (timidity), but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.<sup>14</sup>* This is to say: God has **given** us the power to love. We possess the option of cowering in fear and timidity or—on the other hand—of tapping the power of love and speaking unequivocally of the unsullied value of life, the irrevocable imperative of justice, the incontrovertible mandate of the Gospel: to love one another, to care for one another, to stand on the side of those who choose love.

*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* How has he loved us? His bloody form on the cross says it without words. He loves us like that, he holds nothing back, he gives himself totally to you, to me, to the world.<sup>15</sup> Can we love like that? Hold nothing back? Give ourselves totally to others? On our streets, in our world? In these times of maximum danger?

### **Conclusion: The Maximum Hope—Choose Love**

As we stand with all humanity on the precipice, the maximum danger implies the maximum hope.<sup>16</sup> It was precisely the destruction and violence of Habakkuk's day that gave rise, like a Phoenix out of ashes, to the prophet's hope and to the hopeful word from the God of Jacob. Without the intensity of the threat, hope is divested of its intense purpose, for the maximum danger implies the maximum hope. Then let us stand on the side of those who choose love, for "we have nothing to lose but everything. If we were to fail [—even were we to love one another **and** perish—] it is better, in any case, to have stood on the side of those who choose life, (on the side of those who choose love) than on the side of those who are destroying."

May God's love be manifested in our love! May God's love and our love—like an affirming flame—glow on the horizon as the sunrise drives away the dark and welcomes the dawn of lasting peace.

God's love through our love—it is our immediate and our everlasting hope.

### Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Rochester to Jane in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (Chapter XX, p. 250)
- <sup>2</sup> Variation on Stephen Crane's phrase in *The Red Badge of Courage* (Ch. 9): The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer.
- <sup>3</sup> Adapted from Harry Chapin's song *Remember When the Music*: Remember when the music was a glow on the horizon of every newborn day and as we sang the sun came up to chase the dark away and life was good because we knew we could.
- <sup>4</sup> Adapted from Dylan Thomas's poem *Poem in October* [1946:]  
Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother  
Through parable  
Of sunlight  
And the legend of the green chapels.
- <sup>5</sup> Langston Hughes, *Harlem* (1951)
- <sup>6</sup> Habakkuk 1:2-3
- <sup>7</sup> See J.E. McFadyen, Habakkuk, Introduction, *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*, 1929, p. 804
- <sup>8</sup> Psalm 2:1-2; used by G.F. Handel as a powerful bass solo in his oratorio *The Messiah*
- <sup>9</sup> Robert Frost, *Fire and Ice*
- <sup>10</sup> Albert Camus, "The Wager of Our Generation," *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 1960, 1974, p. 246
- <sup>11</sup> John 15:12
- <sup>12</sup> W. H. Auden, *September 1, 1939*, from stanza 1 and stanza 8
- <sup>13</sup> Jessica Benson Kuntz, Class of 2006, Mt. Lebanon High School, quoted with permission
- <sup>14</sup> II Timothy 1:7
- <sup>15</sup> According to Elam Davies, James Denny used these words at a meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.
- <sup>16</sup> Albert Camus, *The Wager of our Generation*, p. 247