

Rev. Ellen Dawson | August 11, 2019
Romans 8: 12-25| “Eager Expectation”
FOX CHAPEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Old Testament Reading -- Psalm 33:12-22

12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
the people he chose for his inheritance.
13 From heaven the Lord looks down
and sees all mankind;
14 from his dwelling place he watches
all who live on earth—
15 he who forms the hearts of all,
who considers everything they do.

16 No king is saved by the size of his army;
no warrior escapes by his great strength.
17 A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
despite all its great strength it cannot save.
18 But the eyes of the Lord are on those
who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
19 to deliver them from death
and keep them alive in famine.

20 We wait in hope for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.
21 In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.
22 May your unfailing love be with us, Lord,
even as we put our hope in you.

New Testament Reading -- Romans 8:12-25

12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Present Suffering and Future Glory

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

I got the news a few months ago: friends of mine are expecting. It is their first child, which makes it even more exciting news for them to share, and for us, their friends, to receive. I worked beside them for several summers at a conference. I was at their wedding in Ohio. I prayed with them over the phone about career decisions. And a few weeks ago, I got to see them and hug them, and see Emily's belly! I got to share in the true excitement that this baby brings for them.

You see, when we talk of pregnancy, we often use this language: language of joy, and of hope, and of expectation. However, being in the midst of expectation isn't always pretty -- anyone here who has had a child knows -- it's hard work, it's not always fun to be waiting and preparing, to be getting tests and waiting for results, to be changing physically and emotionally. Because expectation often also comes with exhaustion, fear, pain, and sometimes, even heartache.

In today's passage, the apostle Paul reminds us that we are in the midst of expectation. Back in the year 57 AD, and here in the year 2019, and every year in between, we have been experiencing what comes along with the waiting: the hope, the joy, but also the fear and the pain, as we wait to be with Christ in glory.

Well, we must remember: Paul is writing to the early Christians in Rome, who came from a predominantly polytheistic, or pagan background. Before they heard of Jesus, they worshiped many different gods and demigods depending on their own situations and needs. Romans were heavily influenced by Greek mythology, and they also had a large group who belonged to the Imperial Cult, a people who actually practiced Emperor worship. So, here he was, encouraging these relatively new Christians who are diverse, who are still eagerly learning, and who are still struggling to fully understand and know what it means to follow Jesus Christ.

He begins this letter with a greeting, "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Here, Paul introduces himself as an apostle and servant. He also introduces Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecies, a descendant of the great King David, and the Son of God who resurrected from the dead. This is a pretty comprehensive and informative first impression. But it's important that he first remind them who Jesus is and who he himself is as an apostle.

So now we fast forward to Chapter 8. Here, Paul writes about the freedom from the law of sin and death, that which is forgiveness and eternal life in Christ Jesus. He explains, "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering." He reminds the early Christians in Rome of the full purpose of Christ's death, which not only offered

reconciliation with God, but also gave them freedom from death. As a response, Paul says they are to live life according to the Spirit.

Living life according to the Spirit is a big theme for Paul. What it means to live life according to the Spirit could be an entire sermon series in itself. So I will try to summarize. A life that is lived according to the Spirit is one that resists the fleshly desires that tempt us to sin. Paul juxtaposes the flesh and the Spirit many times. Living by the Spirit means living with a focus on and a daily attitude of seeking God's will, praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and reflecting holiness.

But living this way is not just a "thank you" to God for what he has done for you. Living according to the Spirit also identifies you as a child of God. The same Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead also brings about our adoption as children of God. We become heirs of God, and therefore, co-heirs with Jesus Christ. This is Paul's entire thesis and argument.

Paul stresses becoming heirs of God and being co-heirs with Christ because for those new Christians this was astronomically important...this is about identity. They now could identify themselves as a new creation, as a person with freedom, as a no-longer-idol-worshiping-disciple of the Messiah Jesus Christ.

Paul stresses this because for us Christians here in 2019 this is also a monumentally life-changing principle. This is about our identity. As followers of Jesus Christ gathered here to worship him today, each of you are reminded that you are the light of the world, part of a royal priesthood, God's masterpiece.

The apostle Paul reminds us that because of this truth, we can cry *Abba*, Father. *Abba* is the defining term for father in the Aramaic language, spoken by Jesus and Paul as an intimate term to characterize their personal relationships with God. We can cry *Abba* Father to reflect the knowledge that God knows us better than we know ourselves and He established paths for us before we took our first steps as humans. We can cry *Abba* Father because he knows our pain and the desires of our hearts.

So, as those created by God, chosen by God, and adopted by God, we have a new identity, we receive the same inheritance as co-heirs with Christ.

What does that mean? That means we share in his sufferings but we also share in his glory.

Now, I get the suffering part. I think most of us here do. And so did the apostle Paul. Even a couple thousand years ago, suffering was a reality. There was hunger. There were lies. There was hate, and there was illness, and there was discrimination.

Paul writes - For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Even in the midst of this expectation of our own final redemption and of finally being with Christ in glory, we suffer. We groan. Actually, all of creation groans.

Every time a child dies of malnutrition, creation groans.

Every time a woman is paid for like she is a piece of property, creation groans.

Every time an elderly veteran eats soup out of a can because he has no money left for the month, creation groans.

Every time a family leaves their homeland because they fear for their lives, creation groans.

Every time a person carries out a manifesto by opening fire with an automatic weapon, creation groans.

And as creation groans and we experience the suffering - or even just observe it - we are waiting. And that's the hard part.

In *The Problem of Pain*, the classic by C.S. Lewis, he writes, "Scripture and tradition habitually put the joys of heaven into the scale against the sufferings of earth, and no solution of the problem of pain which does not do so can be called a Christian one" (*The Problem of Pain*, 144). He is explaining here that suffering must be seen in light of the promise of eternal happiness with God. Otherwise, we are out of balance.

It is author Randy Alcorn, in his extensive study on C.S. Lewis, who explains that though we struggle and suffer, God does not minimize or deny it. He tackles it head on. And it is the apostle Paul who boldly faces this subject, too. Alcorn says we must not forget that "Resurrection is the hinge on which the problem of suffering turns. This is a groaning creation, we are groaning people and the Holy Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings." And according to C.S. Lewis, we don't know how to look past the suffering and the pain. We have a problem seeing the hope.

What our scripture teaches us today is this: there is hope. Yes, in the midst of groaning and of suffering - in the midst of tears and protests, in the midst of modern-day slavery and humanitarian crises, there is hope. We are to be, as N.T. Wright proposes, with all creation "on tiptoes with excitement" awaiting the renewal and the return of Christ. But that doesn't come naturally for us.

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes,

“Our whole education tends to fix our minds on this world. . . . When the real want for Heaven is present in us, we do not recognize it. Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. . . . If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.”

We’ve had another tough week in America. A week of grieving, discussions on new policies, and immigration raids. There were memorial services. There were families falling apart. There were kids who went hungry.

But I remind you that this week, Jesus was still at work, in and through us. There were life-saving surgeries performed. There were dollar bills given to homeless people at a stoplight. There were food pantry distributions. There were phone calls to say “I forgive you.” There were marriages and anniversaries and graduations and even new babies born.

For my friends, they are in an interesting time of the pregnancy. She’s been having some unique cravings, so maybe the struggling is more on his side right now. But no matter what, they know that the pain will be worth it, when they hold their baby for the first time and see a glimpse of heaven.

We see the suffering. But do you also see the hope? The hope of heaven that is in our midst right here on earth? So wait, expectantly, with hope. Focus on the things of the things of heaven, brothers and sisters, while also listening to that Spirit in you. As you wait, remember your identity. Cry *Abba* Father. And wait in hope, as Psalm 33 so wonderfully encourages us to do:

We wait in hope for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.
In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.
May your unfailing love be with us, Lord,
even as we put our hope in you.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.