

Written Copy: Romans 8:18-23 “Groaning in Anticipation”

8th Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 11

Sunday, July 23rd, 2023

Text: Romans 8:18-23

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Exegetical Statement

Paul has just stated that the Spirit’s presence and work within us bears witness that we are children of the Heavenly Father, and we have the inheritance that Christ earned for us, that will be given to us on the Last Day. But meanwhile we will suffer with Christ in this life. However, the afflictions that we suffer through now, some of which are life in a fallen world, some of which are caused by our sin, and some the temptation set upon by the devil, none of them can compare with what is to come. Creation groans under the weight of our sinful mismanagement, but also the curse that the LORD put upon it in the Garden to keep us repentant and looking forward not to heaven on earth now, but the restoration of the Garden of Eden in eternal life to come. We groan too under the weight of those afflictions, but we groan not on our own, but with the indwelling Spirit who is our Comforter. He points to the redemption Christ has already accomplished in us, redeeming our souls from the devil’s kingdom of death-living apart from God, and restoring us to a place before Him now. And as our hearts have been redeemed, we know that we also will be totally redeemed and restored, along with Creation on the Last Day. We can’t yet see what that restoration will be like now, but by the sure and certain hope of faith we look with eager and certain longing for what is to come. And as we live and groan onward, the Spirit comes alongside us, lifting us up, interceding for us in prayer with the Father, and granting to us what God knows we need now so that we will stand in faith at the resurrection and restoration of Creation and God’s children to come.

Focus Statement:

The Lord promises that the groaning, as bad as it is, will not compare to the glory of what is to come. We have a taste of that now in the redemptive and restoring work of Christ saving us out of the devil’s kingdom and into His kingdom. Here He sends His Spirit to walk with us, lift us up, comfort us, and keep pointing to the complete restoration and redemption that Christ will bring about for all God’s children on Resurrection Day

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

We live through a time of groaning caused by our sin, but also the curse God put on Creation. We know this is not how things should be. The unrest and inhumanity around us scare us. We question why we must go through this, and where God is in all this.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Hold fast to this promise of restoration of Creation to the perfection of the Garden, as well as our perfection body and soul. Allow the Spirit to comfort us and keep us in faith through means of grace.

Subject Sentence: We groan now, but by faith anticipate restoration

Introduction: Our Groaning, Creation & Humanity Groaning

Uuuugggghhh!!! Oh man! Not again!! Does that sound familiar? Have you said those words or something quite similar in the last several days? What are they? They are the sound of something not going right, once again!

These are the sounds I make many a time when I'm trying to fix something. Now I may have been given some talents and abilities, but as a handyman I am sorely lacking. This was especially impressed upon me many years ago in the first house we owned. We had a leak in the drainpipes under the bathroom sink. So, I consulted my had a handy dandy Readers Digest "Fix-It-Yourself Manual: How to repair, clean, and maintain anything and everything in and around your home." It was a birthday gift from my brother. It seemed to be perfect for a dude like me who hadn't had the most experience maintaining a home. I consulted the chapter in the book on replacing bathroom drainpipes. I look at what had been installed in the first place before we bought the house (when the pipe had not been leaking yet). I made a list and went to Home Depot and got all the parts that seemed to be needed. I began to install the new pipes, putting the plumbers' tape on the threads of the pipe, installed the gaskets, using plumbers' putty around where the curved pipe trap came up and met the drain pipe from the sink. I got it all installed, and it leaked. I took it apart and tried again, using more plumbers tape, putty, tightening the gaskets and the pipes. And; it still leaked, even more this time. I tried it a third time, carefully reading through the book, making sure I hadn't cross threaded anything. And it still leaked. So gave one of those groans of frustration, followed by some colorful words that I cannot repeat in this Sanctuary. At that point, I picked up the phone and called my brother, who came out and tried to show me what I should've done, as he fixed the leaky pipe for me. But what happened a year or so later when the pipes under the laundry sink began leaking? More of the same, followed by an even greater groaning mixed in with colorful metaphors.

Have you groaned like that lately? If not just turn on the TV News. We've got problems with nature played out before us: hurricanes, tornados, hail large enough to damage cars (as happened in Davison last Thursday), floods, wildfires, excessive heat, droughts. And we've got man's inhumanity against man: the plethora of gun violence and killings, corruption in government. We have a Congress that is supposed to pass legislation that provides help with some of those things that make us groan, but instead they are too busy themselves groaning and calling each other names like they were a bunch of school children. And speaking of children, instead of educating our children about the natural world, schools are trying to reprogram their birth gender. It no longer matters what gender they were born with, what gender God created them to be. Children too young to even really even know what it means to be a girl, or a boy, are being encouraged to explore what it would be like to be a different gender, instead of being taught to be proud of the gender God gave them. I often think about what my father would say to all this if he were still alive. I know he would

shake his head, let out a loud groan, and perhaps some of those words I can't repeat here in worship.

There may be different reasons you make those groaning sounds. But I would wager that we all make them, and more often than we'd like to admit. We make them because time and again things do not go right in our lives. Things do not happen or play out like we believe they are supposed to. Even when we aren't entirely sure what the correct thing is, we inherently know that what we have going on now is not the way it's supposed to be.

Why must Creation and Humankind Groan

As we the Church see these things, we groan. But not just us, all humanity is groaning as can be seen in the way we treat one another. And not just humanity, Creation itself is groaning. Its groaning can be seen in all the natural disasters and weather phenomena we see. We know that this is not how things are supposed to be, yet they are. Why is that?

Well, one answer is of course sin. The LORD God created all things to be completely perfect. At creation all of nature worked in harmony. There were no floods, wildfires, natural disasters, excessive heat, or droughts. The Garden of Eden was a perfect and beautiful place whose perfection is beyond our imagination. And in that perfect Garden God created and placed two perfect individuals, a man and a woman: Adam and Eve. He made all of Creation for them. All of it was designed to support all their needs of life so completely that work as we know it did not exist. There was no sweat of the brow to provide food for the family, the plants and the trees provided plentifully and abundantly, and consistently. Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with each other, with nature, and with all the animals. Even the fiercest animals we have today: lions, and bears, and alligators-none of them were afraid of man, and man wasn't afraid of them. They co-existed perfectly. Adam could pet a lion on its head, or rub an alligator's snout, and nothing bad would happen. And the animals did not kill or maim one another. Remember how God brought all of them together in Adam's presence for him to name them and there was no great carnage. Adam and Eve were created in the perfect sinless image of God and well equipped to carry out His two marching orders: manage Creation and procreate.

So, what happened? Adam and Eve sinned. And when they sinned, they ruined the perfect state of all things. They no longer carried the unstained image of God. They became selfish and devious. They no longer cared about what was best for Creation, or each other, or the future generations, they cared only about themselves. That is how mankind manages God's creation today. There are still plenty of resources in this world to support the population we have and even more. The problem is: those that have refuse to share. And everyone puts their own comfort and interest ahead of others. Instead of living in peace we have wars and violence and fighting and disagreements. And it causes us to groan, because we know that's not how things are supposed to be.

But there is another related cause. We have these fateful words spoken by the LORD at the Fall of mankind. **Genesis 3:17-19** ¹⁷ **And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”** Creation groans because God cursed it. God’s curse caused the futility in Creation in that it can no longer do what He originally designed it to do: work in harmony with mankind to support our life in this world. Instead, we have dangerous wild animals that threaten our existence, and dangerous acts of nature that threaten our existence. And we groan as we suffer through these things knowing deep down that this is not how things are supposed to be.

The Partial Restoration Now

As Paul states in **Romans 8:20-21** ²⁰ **For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.**

Why did God subject creation to this curse and bring about its groaning and our groaning? So that we would remember what caused it all, our sin and repent of it. But also, so that we would not fall in love with this fallen broken world but hold fast, groaning in anticipation for the hope in the promise of what is yet to come; what is yet to come for Creation as well as for us.

We already see that promise in action, because the freedom from bondage and corruption has already begun; not in Creation, but in us. Jesus Christ came to begin setting us free by His work of redemption: His suffering, death, and resurrection. Through this work He paid the price to break our spiritual bondage to sin, and thereby our bondage to live spiritually in the devil’s kingdom, where we were condemned to a life lived apart from our Creator God now and for eternity. His death and resurrection set us free from that fate, and by His gift of faith He places us firmly into His kingdom, His reign and rule. Even so, spiritually speaking, we still groan. We groan because we all have that battle going on inside us which is the sinful heart warring against the redeemed and restored heart. But Christ has won this war. His love and grace triumphs over our sin. And because He won, through our baptismal faith, we win too.

His Spirit testifies to this fact within us. Through our baptism we have been declared to be Children of God, restored to a rightful place before Him by faith. So that even as we sin and confess our fallen state as “poor miserable sinners”, the words of the Gospel that are the Absolution witness to our triumph now over sin. The Spirit testifies that all the sins we know of, and those that we do not, are forgiven as we live out our lives in this world in repentant faith. We groan because we sin. But we rejoice in Christ grace and forgiveness that triumphs over it. Through the Spirit keeping us in repentant faith He frees us from those chains of bondage to sin just as fast as we try to wrap them around ourselves.

We can and should rejoice in this partial restoration. And even as we continue to groan, we look forward with anticipation to the greater restoration to come.

The Complete Restoration To Come

Romans 8:22-23 ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

What is this day of future adoption as sons? Aren't we already that? We are declared by faith to be that. But there is a day coming when what you are declared to be by faith will be your complete reality. It's the day when the groaning within us will be done forever. It is the day of the redemption of our bodies. It's Resurrection Day, when our bodies will be raised from death to life and restored to the perfection God always intended them to have. You will be restored and made perfect beyond what you ever have been, even on the best day of your life. All the weakness, and disease, all the imperfections like diabetes, the poor eyesight, poor circulation, all the aches and pains that cause you to groan now will be gone, forever. You will be stronger and more vibrant than you've ever been. And no illness, cancer, or sickness will ever knock you down and infect you again. And never again will you experience death. Into these perfect bodies Jesus will place your perfected souls, glorified, with the sinful self gone forever. No more sin, no more temptation to sin. No more groaning. Only complete joy and happiness.

And what about Creation? It too, along with us, will be completely restored to the original perfection God created it to be. God's curse will be gone, the effects of our sinful mismanagement will be gone. You will see just how wonderful the Garden of Eden was before the Fall. And you will not only see it, but you will also live in it. Once again all of nature will work in harmony with us to support our lives. All those natural disasters that cause us to groan will be forever gone. The fruit and vegetables will be plentiful for the taking and eating. And they will taste better than they ever have in our lifetime on this earth. No more will you have to work and slave to eek out an existence. You and I will live at peace with all Creation, including the animals. Once again you can pet a lion or a bear, or an alligator. The animals will live in peace with one another and with us. And best of all, we will all live in complete harmony and peace with one another. All causes of man's inhumanity against man will be gone. We will live in a peace that is beyond our experience, beyond our imagination. And it will last forever.

Conclusion

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

You can understand why Paul would say that our current sufferings and groanings cannot compare with what is awaiting us in the New Heaven and New Earth. For now, we do groan, and Creation groans with us. But we do not groan alone. Christ has sent His Spirit to walk with us and be our great Comforter. When our groans do not allow us to form words to a prayer, He lifts up our heartfelt emotions to the Father. And the Father, who knows exactly what we need, provides what is always best for you. He doesn't always provide what will stop the groaning. Instead, He provides the power and presence of faith through the Spirit who dwells within you so that He can carry you through the groaning and suffering, keeping you in repentant faith. And He works through the means of grace: the Word and the Sacraments, to keep your eyes on that day that Creation longs for; that day that we groan in anticipation for, the day when Christ's redemption and restoration is complete for you and for all Creation, when you are fully revealed to be the sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father, completely, body and soul. May we all keep our groaning eyes on that day through steadfast faith unto life everlasting. Amen.