

Hope That Groans

Bible reference for sermon : Romans 8:12-25

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. Copy text of sermon in place of text below.

Let us pray: God of hope, quiet our anxious hearts, open our ears to your Spirit, and help us to trust your promises so that we may live as your beloved children, waiting with confidence for the day when you make all things new. Amen.

We spend much of our lives waiting. We wait for rain after a long, dry summer. We wait for the phone call from the doctor. We wait for children to arrive home safely. We wait for relationships to heal. We wait for grief to become less sharp than it once was. Sometimes we wait for answers to prayers that seem to disappear into silence. Waiting is part of being human. And if we listen carefully, we discover that we are not the only ones waiting.

Paul writes, "The whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now."



What a remarkable image. He doesn't describe creation as worn out or ready to be discarded. He doesn't say that God has abandoned the world. Instead, he pictures creation as a woman in labour. There is pain, certainly, but it is pain that points beyond itself. Labour is never the end of the story. It is the beginning of something new. That is how Paul invites us to see our lives. There is suffering. There is loss. There is uncertainty. But because of Christ, none of these has the final word. Perhaps that is

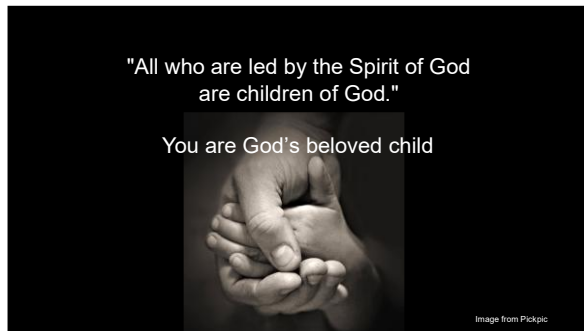
the hardest thing for us to believe. The suffering is easy to see. Hope is often much harder.

Paul knew that. The Christians in Rome were discovering that following Christ did not remove suffering from their lives. They lived in a world where poverty was common, illness was ever-present and the Roman Empire demanded loyalty that belonged to God alone. Becoming a Christian did not make life easier. Yet Paul does not begin by talking about suffering. He begins by reminding them who they are.

"All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God."

Before Paul speaks about hope, he speaks about identity. Because if we forget who we are, we will struggle to know how to wait.

Our world offers us many identities. It tells us that we are what we achieve. What we earn. What others think of us. It quietly persuades us that our worth depends on our success, our health or our usefulness. But those identities are fragile. They can disappear with a redundancy notice, a diagnosis, the loss of someone we love, or simply the passing of time.



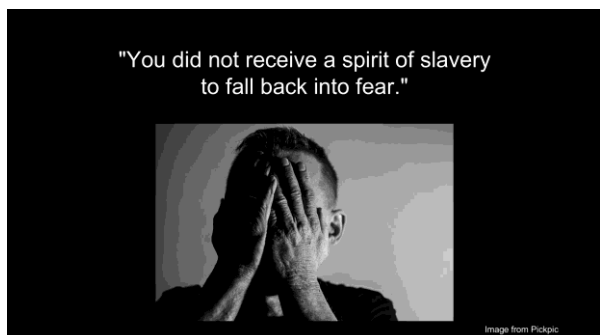
Paul offers something far more enduring. You are God's beloved child. Not because you have earned that place. Not because your faith is strong enough. Not because you have finally become the person you think God wants you to be. You belong because God has claimed you through Christ. Everything begins there.

The Christian life always begins with grace. Faith is never our climb towards God. It is our empty hands receiving what God freely gives. That is exactly Paul's point.

We have received the Spirit. Received—not achieved. Received—not deserved. Received. That one word contains the whole gospel.

Paul then reaches for the image of adoption. In the Roman world, adoption meant receiving the full rights of belonging to a family. An adopted son became an heir. The family name became his own. The inheritance belonged to him. Paul says that this is what God has done for us. God has not simply forgiven us from a distance. He has welcomed us into the family. That is why the Spirit teaches us to pray as Jesus prayed: "Abba! Father!" This is not the frightened prayer of someone trying to earn God's approval. It is the trusting cry of a beloved child who already knows they belong. That changes everything. Fear begins to lose its power.

Paul says, "You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear." Fear is a relentless master. It tells us there will never be enough. It tells us to protect ourselves before anyone else. It tells us tomorrow will always be worse than today. It convinces us that everything depends upon us.



The Spirit tells another story. The Spirit reminds us that our lives rest in God's hands. Not because life suddenly becomes easy. But because we belong to the One who has already walked through suffering and death and emerged into resurrection life. Jesus

himself prayed, "Abba," not on a peaceful afternoon, but in the darkness of Gethsemane. Even as he faced the cross, he trusted the Father. Now that same Spirit enables us to pray the same prayer. Not because our lives are free from suffering. But because we know whose we are.

Paul is realistic. He never promises that Christians avoid suffering. Indeed, he says that if we share Christ's life, we will also share his sufferings. At first, that sounds discouraging. Until we remember what happened to Jesus. The cross was not the end of his story. Neither is suffering the end of ours.

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us."



Paul writes, *"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us."*

He insists that suffering is not the whole story.

When we stand beside a hospital bed, when we bury someone we love, when we wonder what sort of world our grandchildren will inherit, God does not ask us to not to grieve. Instead, God invites us to see our lives in the light of Easter. Because Easter tells us that God specialises in bringing life where we expect only death. The resurrection is not simply an event we remember once a year. It is God's promise about the future of the whole creation. And that promise is already at work among us.

The Holy Spirit is the first sign that God's future has begun. Like the first green shoots appearing after long-awaited rain, the Spirit reminds us that what God has begun, God will surely complete. That is why Paul now lifts our eyes beyond our own lives. He invites us to see that we are not waiting alone. The whole creation is waiting with us.

Paul widens the horizon: *"The whole creation waits with eager longing."* The Greek word Paul uses is wonderfully expressive. It describes someone stretching forward, craning their neck, trying to catch the first glimpse of someone they long to see. That is creation. Waiting. Watching. Longing. Not for escape, but for renewal.

"The whole creation waits with eager longing."

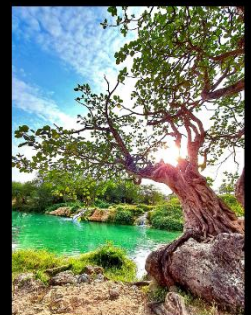


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Sometimes we might imagine that God's plan is simply to rescue us from the earth. Paul says something much bigger. God intends to redeem all that he has made. The resurrection of Jesus is not God's rescue from creation. It is the beginning of creation's renewal. That changes how we look at the world around us. When rain finally falls on dry

paddocks, when bushland begins to recover after fire, when birds return after a season of silence, we catch a glimpse of the resilience woven into God's creation. We know that creation is beautiful, but we also know it is wounded.

Paul says that creation's suffering and our suffering are connected. The earth groans. And so do we. "Not only the creation," Paul says, "but we ourselves groan inwardly." I find those words strangely comforting. Sometimes Christians feel they should always appear cheerful, as though faith leaves no room for sorrow. Yet one of the greatest apostles speaks openly about groaning.

Faith gives us permission to bring our whole lives before God. The tears we shed. The prayers we cannot finish. The fears we struggle to name. The grief that still catches us by surprise. The Spirit receives them all. Indeed, only people who have glimpsed God's future truly know how to groan. If you have never known love, you never long for reunion. If you have never tasted hope, you never ache for fulfilment. Our longing is not evidence that God has abandoned us. It is evidence that the Spirit has awakened our hearts to the world as God intends it to be. Hope makes us restless. It refuses to accept that violence, injustice, loneliness and death are simply "the way things are." It keeps whispering, "There is more."

Paul says, "**In hope we were saved.**" Christian hope is very different from optimism. Optimism depends on circumstances improving. Hope depends on the faithfulness of God. Optimism fades when life becomes difficult. Hope endures because Christ is risen. That is why hope can stand beside a hospital bed. Hope can sit quietly with those who mourn. Hope can keep praying when answers seem slow in coming. Hope can keep working for justice when change feels painfully slow. Hope can keep loving when it would be easier to give up. Not because we are naturally resilient. But because Christ has already entered death and transformed it from within. The resurrection changes everything.



Paul then talks about the "the first fruits" of the Spirit. His readers would have understood immediately. The first fruits were the first signs of the coming harvest. They were not the harvest itself. They were the promise that the harvest was on its way.

That is what the Holy Spirit is for us. Whenever forgiveness triumphs over bitterness... Whenever strangers become neighbours... Whenever someone discovers they are

deeply loved by God... Whenever we gather around this table to receive Christ's body and blood... Whenever peace is chosen instead of revenge...

We glimpse the first fruits of God's new creation. These moments may seem small. But so did an empty tomb on the first Easter morning. God has always delighted in beginning with what seems small. A mustard seed. A loaf of bread. A cup of wine. A handful of frightened disciples. An empty grave. And from these ordinary things God brings extraordinary life.

So how do we live while we wait? Not with despair. Not with frantic urgency, as though everything depends upon us. But with patient faithfulness. We continue to worship. We continue to repent. We continue to pray. We continue to forgive. We continue to care for one another. We continue to care for God's creation. Not because we believe we can build God's kingdom by our own efforts, but because we know where history is heading. Every act of love and compassion. Every word of encouragement. Every meal shared. Every child welcomed. Every lonely person visited. Every quiet prayer. All become signs pointing towards the world God has promised. This is our calling as God's beloved children. To live today in the light of tomorrow. To become, by the Spirit's power, small glimpses of the future God is preparing.

So we leave this place still living in a world that groans. We will hear difficult news. We will carry concerns for those we love. We will continue to wait for healing, for peace, for justice and for answers to prayers that have not yet been fulfilled. But we will not wait alone. The Spirit has made us God's beloved children. Christ has gone before us through suffering into resurrection. And the God who has begun this good work will not abandon it—not in us, and not in all creation. So we wait. Not with despair. Not with fear. But with hope. Because the future already has a face. It is the face of the risen Christ. And one day, when the waiting is over, when creation is finally set free, and when every tear is wiped away, we shall see him as he is. On that day, all that now groans will give way to joy, and all that God has promised will be fulfilled. Until then, we live by the Spirit, we walk by faith, and we wait with hope.

Amen.

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>