

August 3, 2014
Pentecost 8

“Present Suffering: Future Glory”

ROMANS 8:18-25

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons 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 glorious freedom 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 as sons, 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 he already has? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

This past week I received an email from one of our WELS members in Southern California that read, “Please pray for Dr. Kent Brantly and Nancy Writeboll who are serving the Lord through medicine in Liberia and are infected with the Ebola virus.” Not only do we pray for these Christian medical workers, we pray also that this virus not spread beyond Western Africa to other parts of the world.

A long as this world stands people will die from sickness and disease in a variety of different forms. Recently a healthy young woman who ran triathlons was bitten by a brown recluse spider. A few weeks later she died. Ambulances race through our community to take people to our fine hospital where they can be treated for the sicknesses or accidents that threatens their lives.

The Apostle Paul reminds us this morning that the present sufferings of this life, whatever they might be, cannot begin to compare to the glory that will be revealed to us when Jesus returns in glory. In John 14 Jesus said, “I am going to prepare a place for you.” The sufferings of this present life seem small by comparison to the place that Jesus is carefully preparing for us. Take a legal pad such as this and draw a line down the middle. List on the left side the sufferings you have experienced in this life. Now on the right side list the glories that are waiting for you when Jesus returns. The sufferings of this life are not worth comparing to the glory that will be ours.

Present Suffering

The present sufferings are certainly real. Paul says, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” When you consider your present sufferings, you cannot simply ignore them and act as if they are not real or don’t exist. If the doctor shows you an X-Ray that reveals major problems with the bones in your spine, you cannot simply ignore the evidence and say it is not real.

What causes pain and suffering? Paul tells us "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glory freedom of the children of God." All of creation is subject to frustration, and all of creation is in bondage to decay.

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God they came under the curse of sin and its consequences. The Lord told Adam and Eve that the day they ate from the forbidden fruit they would die. Death did not come immediately to Adam. In fact he lived for 930 years before he died. During that long life on this earth he experienced first-hand the ravages of sin in a once perfect world. He found himself fighting with his wife Eve. The fighting in families continues down to this day bringing no end of suffering and sorrow and sadness. Adam and Eve suffered the pain of seeing their son Cain kill his brother Abel. They experienced first-hand the curse of God on the land when they planted crops and saw them overcome with thorns and thistles. I have hoed thistles on the family farm. Hoeing thorns and thistles is not nearly as frustrating as the jobs people have today that involve staring for hours at a computer screen and putting up with politics in the work place.

Even the plant and animal world suffers. The cat enjoys tormenting the mouse that it catches. The lions drag down the wildebeest on the plains of Africa. Hungry wolves attack elk trapped in the deep snow of Yellowstone National Park. National Geographic reminds its viewers, "In Nature there are no happy endings." Even the plants are groaning in pain as extreme and even exceptional drought plagues large portions of California. The sufferings of the plants, the sufferings of the animals and the sufferings of human beings cannot be ignored. They are real. They come through Adam's fall into sin. We cannot say that God is punishing us for something we have done wrong as Job's friends tried to tell him.

There are different levels of suffering that come to people. There are some people who go through life without ever experiencing a surgery or even a broken bone in their body. There are others such as my uncle Carl who had over twenty major surgeries on his body. With all the advances in modern medicine people are living longer. Often that means more trips to the doctor and more medications to keep people going. God never gave Job an explanation for all his pain and suffering that came into his life. He simply asked Job, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" There are no explanations for why some suffer more for Adam's sin than others. All we can do is listen to the Lord speak to us in the words of Psalm 46 where he says, "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Present sufferings include more than just the problems we experience in our world and in our personal lives through Adam's fall into sin. Present sufferings include the sufferings we go through for the name of Christ. Think of what Paul experienced in his life for the name of Jesus. Shortly after Jesus rescued him from his sin, he told Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake." Paul had scars on his body, not from multiple surgeries, but from multiple beatings for the name of Jesus. If there are any Iraqi Christians left in areas taken over by Muslim extremist they will certainly be severely persecuted or even put to death. Jesus said, "If any would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

But let's go back to our legal pad. We can list on one side the sufferings we may face in this life. For some of us the list may be short and for others it is quite long. But now let's look on the other side of the pad to see the glory that will be ours.

The Future Glory

All of creation groans in anticipation of the of the glory that is coming in the future. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up until the present time." God's creation groans and longs for the day when Jesus comes in glory to destroy this present world and rebuild a new heaven and new earth. 2 Peter 3 says, "The day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." You can be sure trees and plants will not go through times of drought in this new heaven and new earth. You can be sure that animals will not hurt other animals. You can be sure that in this home of righteousness people will not be hurting people and making their lives miserable. In heaven we will be with Jesus and see his glory. We will experience what Paul calls "the glorious freedom of the sons of God." In heaven there will be no more pain, no more sorrow, no more suffering. God will wipe away all tears from our eyes.

As we look at the right hand side of the legal pad, we see the list of glories that will be ours that far outweigh the suffering we experience in this life. Paul writes about our longing and yearning for that time to come. "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." If you spend any time at all with other Christians, you find them groaning and yearning and sighing and longing for Jesus to come in glory and bring these future blessings into our lives. If we could attach a special monitoring device to measure how often the Holy Spirit helps us remember the glory that will someday be ours, we would be astounded at this wonderful work of the Holy Spirit. Just as fuel keeps a fire burning, the Holy Spirit keeps your hope of glory alive. The Holy Spirit helps you minimize your sufferings on maximize your glory.

We eagerly anticipate what Paul calls the redemption of our bodies. As long as live in these bodies we prisoners of the process of dying. We are subject to the problems that come with Adam's fall into sin. When Jesus comes in glory, he will raise our lowly bodies and shape them to be like his glorious body. 1 Corinthians 15 says that we will be changed in a moment, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. Blink your eyes for me this morning. That is how quickly the Lord will raise us up again and give us glorified bodies. They will be bodies just as he has determined them to be. 1 Corinthians 15 says "But God gives it a body as he has determined."

This anticipation of the future glory that is ours fills each day of our lives on earth with this amazing hope. "For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not have, we wait for it patiently." What is hope? Hope is believing that something you do not see is even more real than things you do see. A former member of our congregation, Luella Bestul, was fond of saying, "Isn't it amazing how we long to be in a place we have never been before."

Listen to these amazing words from Paul in 2 Corinthians 4, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." So we look at the left hand column on this pad and see the troubles we face. Our faith in Jesus allows us to say "Oh, that is only temporary." It allows us to say, "In the light of eternity does it really matter." Then we look at the right hand column and what we see with the eyes of faith is eternal. We fix our eyes on what is not seen, not what is seen. I cannot look into myself and say, "I know this real because I have lived such a good life." I look into myself and see nothing but sin and shame. Then I look up to Jesus and say, "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom." I hear the voice of Jesus say, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." That is our hope. That is our future glory. Amen.