

Romans 8:18-25

¹⁸For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. ¹⁹In fact, creation is waiting with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in the hope ²¹that even creation itself will be set free from slavery to corruption, in order to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.

²²For we know that all of creation is groaning with birth pains right up to the present time. ²³And not only creation, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. ²⁴Indeed, it was for this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he already sees? ²⁵But if we hope for something we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patient endurance.

Wait

I.

Your eyes slowly open as the fog lifts from your head. Your loved one is there by the bedside. A nurse is there, too, asking if you would like something to drink. You gratefully take the Coke or 7-Up that eases that dry taste in your mouth that's left over from the anesthesia.

The doctor breezes in. The surgery was a success, he assures you. The disease is gone, or the injury has been repaired as best it can be. The danger has passed.

Yet the pain is still there. Your body aches. The nurse and the physical therapist tell you this is normal. This is what healing feels like as it begins to happen. Knowing that doesn't make the pain stop. You are, at the same time, both hurting and healing. You'll have to wait to feel like your old self again.

Paul paints a similar picture in today's reading. We have been redeemed. Jesus paid for all sins. Yet there is still something we must wait for. He spoke of the groaning of creation itself. God did not create the world with the problems we currently endure—with natural disasters and violent weather. God told Adam: "The soil is cursed on account of you. You will eat from it with painful labor all the days of your life. ¹⁸Thorns and thistles will spring up from the ground for you, but you will eat the crops of the field. ¹⁹By the sweat of your face you will eat bread until you return to the soil, for out of it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19, EHV).

Paul echoes what God told Adam. A world tainted by sin is filled with all kinds of problems. "We know that all of creation is groaning with birth pains right up to the present time. ²³And not only creation, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:22-23, EHV).

The problems that cause groaning aren't just "out there." Groans don't come only when we experience violent storms or droughts or floods. Some of the groaning—much of the groaning—is personal. As you grow older, you find that your body doesn't work the way it used to; this isn't just those who are in their 50's or 60's and older, those who are in their 30's realize that certain things are harder than they used to be. Groaning comes when you are in a marriage that is a daily struggle to maintain. You groan when the bank account never quite has enough to deal with the expenses of life. A groan escapes your lips when you

pray for the child that has wandered from the faith; what can you still do to lead him or her back to the Savior?

Paul identified us as those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit. We have redemption. Yet we still groan. We still wait for something more. Jeremiah understood. He said: “I did not sit with the band of partygoers, nor did I celebrate with them... ¹⁸Why is my pain unending? Why is my wound incurable, refusing to heal?” (Jeremiah 15:17-18, EHV). Jeremiah was a man who had seemingly done everything right, yet he still experienced pain.

Then there was Peter in today’s Gospel. Minutes before, in last week’s Gospel, Peter had said: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16, EHV). That was the great confession Jesus said was to be the foundation of his church. But now, just a few minutes later, when Jesus speaks about what he must endure to be the Savior of all people, Peter grabs him and pulls him aside and says: “May you receive mercy, Lord! This will never happen to you” (Matthew 16:22, EHV). Peter wanted the Christ, whom he had confessed moments before, but he didn’t want the cross that came with it. He wanted the crown without any cost.

Wouldn’t that be nice? Wouldn’t it be great if we didn’t have to wait? We want the glory. Fewer of us are willing to sign up for the groaning that comes first.

II.

Jesus says something to Peter that no one would have expected after the praise he had for that great confession earlier. He turns sharply to Peter and says: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a snare to me because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:23, EHV). Then something even more harsh: “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25, EHV). Losing is finding. The cross is not a detour to the crown. The cross is the *way* to the crown.

That’s what Paul means when he defines hope. He says: “Indeed, it was for this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he already sees? ²⁵But if we hope for something we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patient endurance” (Romans 8:24-25, EHV). Hope is not mere wishful thinking. Hope is something you cannot see. Hope is grounded in the promises of God—a promise you can trust. You aren’t hoping for something you already hold in your hand. You wait. You hope for what is still to come.

That’s why Paul says something as staggering as this: “For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18, EHV). He’s not trying to minimize your suffering or mine. Suffering is real. Problems *do* exist. The problems and suffering are difficult. Paul knew that better than most. Remember him listing all the things he had gone through? Being beaten, shipwrecks—more than one, being thrown in prison for no reason other than the gospel, having his thorn in the flesh, whatever that might have been. But Paul knew something better was coming. Paul saw the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

III.

Today’s Gospel said: “From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things... and be killed, and on the third day be raised again” (Matthew 16:21, EHV). Jesus *had* to do it in order to complete God’s plan of salvation. And he *did* do it. Jesus walked every step of that long and difficult road to the cross. He endured the false accusations, the beatings, the spitting by soldiers. He endured the pain of the cross. Most of all, he endured the abandonment of the Heavenly Father while he suffered the unimaginable agony of hell. Jesus was forsaken by God the Father so that *you* never would be.

Paul says: “We know that all of creation is groaning with birth pains right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22, EHV). Living inside a sinful world is like the pains of going through childbirth. There is pain involved, but it isn’t the end of the story; a child enters the world. Nature groans, waiting for something better.

“And not only creation, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23, EHV). God has put his Holy Spirit in you as the firstfruits, the down payment on what is coming. You have faith in your heart. That faith reminds you as you wait that the redemption of your body is coming soon. Just wait.

King David knew the same certainty, even when problems made him groan as he waited. He said in today’s Psalm of the Day: “I trust in you, O LORD. I say, ‘You are my God.’”¹⁵ My times are in your hand” (Psalm 31:14-15, EHV).

Your times—your surgeries, your grief, your financial challenges—are in the hands of the God who did not spare his One and only Son. Paul will say just that a few verses after today’s text: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?” (Romans 8:32, EHV). God has already given you the costliest gift of all. You can trust him to be there for you in every circumstance as you wait for God’s own good time.

IV.

So when your body groans, don’t panic. Wait. The Great Physician has already purchased your healing.

When your family disappoints you, don’t despair. Wait. The Spirit who is already working in you is not finished.

When your prayers seem unanswered, don’t quit. Wait. wait on the Lord, who has promised to never leave you or forsake you.

When the world tempts you to chase comfort now and skip the cross, don’t. Remember Peter’s mistake and wait.

Each of us has the same temptations to want the crown while skipping the cross. The same firstfruits of the Spirit has been given to you and to me. The same cross that brought your redemption brought mine.

So we wait. Not as those without hope. Not wringing our hands at what we cannot see. We wait. We can’t track how many stops are left before the package gets to us, like you can do while you wait for your Amazon package to be delivered. But we wait with that same kind of certainty. Jesus endured his cross before his crown, and he has promised the same for you and me. Wait. He is coming. Amen.