

Text: Romans 8:18-27

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not 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. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. ²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Theme: Patience in the Suffering of this Life

Patience is something that we all lack today. We want things now. It has to happen right away. For instance, I used to wait for a week for a letter to arrive to Germany and another week for the response. Today I send emails, which are instantaneous and free.

We see our lack of patience especially in how we purchase things. When I was a child, I can remember my mother putting money in her Christmas savings every week, so that when Christmas came, she had enough money for all the gifts. Who has a Christmas saving's account today? Is there even a bank that promotes them? Today, the mantra is "Buy now, and pay later." We often find ourselves up to our necks in debt because we bought things for which we didn't have the money.

Our lack of patience is also shown with regard to suffering. Paul writes in this text that when we suffer, Christians wait in hope patiently. We don't like to suffer patiently. If we have a headache, we take a pain reliever. We can get very frustrated when we are going through difficult times.

When I was in grade school, we had a teacher who would often say, "Patience is a virtue." It is, but it is tough to be patient in the face of suffering. In these verses Paul encourages us to be patient as we look to God for comfort and hope.

I. He writes about our sufferings many times in these verses.

We don't have to look very far to find suffering in our lives. There is the suffering that we go through as we struggle with temptation. We all have our weaknesses. Just like when Eve looked at the fruit in the Garden of Eden, temptation still looks good and pleasing to the eye. We think that we can learn something from it. We know that we should stay away from temptation, but it always seems to be around the corner. The Christian life is a struggle against temptation. We want to do what is right, but sin and temptation keep calling. They know exactly where we are most vulnerable.

There are also many struggles that we go through in this life. There are financial problems, problems in our relationships with our family, friends and coworkers. There are tragedies that occur like the

floods that we recently had or a car accident. There are times when we are victims of crime.

In a sermon on this text Luther refers to the crosses that we bear when he says, **“If you want to be a joint-heir with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not suffer with Him, to be His brother and are not like unto Him, Christ will certainly not at the last day acknowledge you as a brother and fellow-heir. Rather he will ask where is your crown of thorns, your cross, the nails and scourge; whether you have been, as He and His follower ever have from the beginning of time, an abomination to the world. If you cannot qualify in this respect, He cannot regard you as His brother. In short, we must all suffer with the Son of God and be made like unto Him...or we shall not be exalted with Him in glory.** (*Luther’s Sermons*, vol 8, p. 100, Baker)

However, what Paul is especially talking about this text is the decay of our bodies. He writes how all creation is subjected to the bondage of decay. When we are young, we grow in size, strength, and mentally. We learn new things. We have an energy that seems boundless. But then there are also times when our bodies make us frustrated. Even as kids, there are other kids who are smarter or more athletic. When we get older, there are things that we used to do, that we simply can’t do anymore. We begin to have aches and pains. We forget things. The best example of this for me was a woman in my first congregation. She had been a farmer and had a vegetable stand. She loved farming and working at the stand. However, by the time that I met her, she was crippled with arthritis. Each time I visited, she said, “Pastor, I have it up here in my head, but my body just can’t do it anymore.” Suffering is not easy. It makes us groan. In fact, Paul writes that the groans of creation as it decays, are very similar to the labor that a woman goes through in childbirth. It is not easy, but the decay in creation is like labor, which is leading to the new life to come.

II. God gives us comfort in the midst of this suffering.

That comfort comes through His Spirit. When we are frightened or suffering, we often call out for our parents when we are children. As Christians we have our Heavenly Father. We just sang, **“This I believe, yea rather, of this I make my boast, that God is my dear Father, the friend who loves me most.”** Earlier in this chapter Paul writes, *“You received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry “Abba” Father. The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children...and co-heirs of Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.”* (8:15-17) In Galatians 4 Paul puts it this way, *“When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls our Abba, Father.”* God loved us sinners so much that He gave His only Son to die for us. He paid for every one of our sins on the cross. In Holy Baptism they were washed away. We were born again to a new life in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit in us reminds us that we are God’s children. He leads us to cry out to our heavenly Father with the word, “Abba!” Abba was the word of endearment similar to how we say “Daddy!”

One of the most comforting sections of this text is when Paul writes that when we are too weak to pray or don’t know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. We groan as we suffer, but God’s Spirit in us groans even more deeply than we ever could, as He intercedes for us.

In John 14 Jesus promised the disciples the comfort of the Holy Spirit. He said that the Spirit would remind them of His words. Then He said, *“Peace, I leave with you. My peace I give you...Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* The Holy Spirit gives us comfort in the midst of our suffering by reminding us that we are God’s children. He points us to God’s love, mercy, and grace through our Savior Jesus Christ.

III. We also have a sure hope in the midst of our suffering.

In just a few months we will be voting for a new president. Each candidate always promises “hope.” We are promised peace, prosperity, lower taxes, and health care. However, the hopes that they give to us are often dashed. But as Christians, we have a sure hope. We know that Jesus Christ died for our sins. He was patient as He suffered on His cross to atone for them all. He died a horrible death and was laid in a grave. BUT that grave could not hold Him. He rose from the dead. That is the foundation of our Christian hope, which Paul calls, *“the redemption of our bodies.”* We all have loved ones who have been carried to the grave. At such times we grieve and our tears flow. If Jesus doesn’t return first, the day will come when each one of our bodies will also be carried to the grave. We find comfort that the spirits of those, who depart this life in faith, are with the Lord, but that is not our hope. Our hope is that the bodies which are dead and buried will rise on the last day, just as Jesus’ body rose from the dead. As Christians we confess, “I believe in the resurrection of the dead.” The day will come when Jesus will return. He will judge the living and the dead. In today’s Gospel lesson Jesus says that the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Mt 13:43) That is the day that we long for as Christians. Our bodies will be raised as glorious bodies. We will need no more glasses. We will run and not lose energy. Forgetfulness will be a thing of the past. There will be no more aches and pain. We won’t struggle with temptation or fall into sin. We will love each other as perfectly as God has loved us, and we will praise our Heavenly Father for the eternal salvation that He has given to us, body and soul. Paul writes that our present sufferings cannot even begin to compare with the glory that will be revealed in us. All of the suffering we went through in this world will be forgotten when we are raised from the dead. They will be incomparable to the glory that God will give to us. Our hope, and the eager expectation of all creation is for the day of resurrection when God will liberate us from this bondage to decay and redeem our bodies for all of eternity in His glory.

When I bring Communion to our shut-in members, there is a slightly different prayer in the agenda which comes after they receive the Lord’s Supper. It begins the same, **“Lord I thank you that you have refreshed me with this salutary gift, and I pray that through it that you would strengthen me in faith towards you and in fervent love for all mankind,”** but then it adds two lines, **“and in patience in every time of trouble and in the blessed hope of everlasting life.”**

Through His Word and Supper God’s Spirit does give us patience and hope, and He reminds us that God is our dear Father who gives us the gift of everlasting life through our Savior Jesus Christ. May He fill our hearts with that patient hope in every time of suffering.

Amen.

Pastor Don Hougard, Benediction Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI – July 20, 2008