

Hope!!-Preached July 19, 2020-Romans 8:18-27

If I were to ask you the question, what gives you hope? How would you answer that question? I would hope all of us would answer Jesus and the Gospel, but what else gives you hope? I think there are several things that typically give us all hope.

For one, when there is an end in sight which is good. You are doing a home or school project and you realize you are on the last wall or the last page. There is hope. You have waited a whole year for your birthday as a kid with visions of many gifts and fond surprises and it finally comes and it is everything you dreamed of. It is hope fulfilled.

I am sure a lot of us might say we have hope when we see good happen. Someone does something nice for us. It can give us hope in humanity. A child shows they are considerate and well-behaved and a hard worker. It can give us hope for our future. This week I got to do VBS skits with three of our youth, plus my children. They tested me at times, but I saw hope for our future in their willingness to take the time and give the effort and take direction.

What else can give us hope? When we know we aren't going through something hard alone, like when a spouse or friend is by our bed-side during an illness or a teacher is there to give guidance through a difficult assignment.

And today, all those sources of hope come together in one passage of Scripture, which I hope and pray will inspire you and encourage you in this time.

It begins with that first aspect of hope. There is an end in sight that is better, as Paul writes, **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”** Now we can't say exactly if Paul had specific things in mind when he referred to their sufferings or just in general, but we can know what our sufferings are in the present time, can't we?

The constant weight of this virus hanging over all of us. The constant uncertainty of what next month is going to bring.

But how is Paul inspired to encourage us? With the hope, that there is an end in sight to our sufferings and it will be better than we can imagine. He points us to our hope in Christ. To the glory that will be revealed to us on the last day.

He points us through his word to Jesus' return on the last day and the end to our present groanings. The present groanings even all of creation, Paul tells us, is feeling.

Now I know it is hard to look around out here and imagine creation groaning, but it is in its own inaudible way. When we were on our vacation in the Badlands, a Park Ranger talked about how our Western plains used to be just teeming with wildlife. He claimed we used to have a form of an animal, like a cheetah, that roamed our Western plains but no more. Bison used to graze by the millions, but now they are just a few herds scattered across our land. What happened to them? Could they not survive after the flood? Were they hunted to extinction or nearly to extinction? We know in the case of the Bison they were. Either way, creation has also had to bear the burden too of our sinful choices, our Fall in the garden.

It is what Paul is referring to when he says this creation is even waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God, in other words the day of Christ's return and the redemption of our bodies on the last day. It is waiting for its renewal after the resurrection and the end to its bondage also to the curse, as remember God cursed the ground when Adam sinned. Now even plants and trees and wildlife dies from disease and decay, but there is hope for it. There is hope for us.

And it isn't found in our human activity, as some scientists would tell us, but in God's activity. In the good that we have seen God do, which gives us hope. The hope found in Christ willingly standing under that curse, willingly being subjected to frustration and futility, like his creation, and willingly letting himself be hunted and bound and sorely mistreated by our hands.

For it was us too who nailed him to that cross. Have you subjected his creation to frustration by your careless words, your thoughtless actions, your hurtful ways? If you have, you drove those nails deeper with each of those times.

But for each of those times, He spoke a powerful message from the cross that says, "I forgive you. I forgive you. I forgive you."

He did it, so we would not have to live in despair over our future, live in shame like Adam and Eve hiding from God out of fear of His judgment, but live in the hope that Your God has offered you full and free forgiveness for your sins. He has offered you the way to be set free from the bondage of corruption you and all

of creation is under and the curse that would sentence us to everlasting death. It comes by the way of His blood. By the way of faith in his amazing grace.

And in that hope, as Paul says, we can wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. The freedom that will come for us from the grave when Jesus calls those who are His, those he made His sons and daughters by the adoption of baptism and through the faith He worked in our hearts towards Christ and we will be raised up in our bodies to live in His new creation. His new heaven and earth. A creation free from bondage and illness, from disagreements and all the groanings of this world.

It is in this hope, Paul tells us, we are saved. But as he reminds us, **“Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”**

And that is the kicker, isn't it. Waiting for that day of Christ's return, for the better days to come, with patience because we are a society who wants things now, don't we and we have come to expect that we will get things now. Don't make me wait in line. Don't make me wait on the phone. Don't make me wait at that stop light as you look at your phone.

I think that is what has so many of us so frazzled about this virus. We are being forced to wait for a vaccine or God's timing for it to end. But I have news for you, sometimes the Lord will make us wait until we get the picture of what he wants us to do.

Jonah had to wait three days in the belly of the whale until he got the picture that when God tells us to do something, he means it. Job had to wait until He got the picture again of who was in control, as he said to God after God spoke to him, **“I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.”**

God has a message we are supposed to take from this time. I just hope we are listening.

But the consolation is, while we are waiting, struggling with patience, he gives us a promise. We do not wait alone in our weakness. As Paul tells us, **“the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”**

Our consolation and hope in this and every time is we are told God has given of himself, His own Spirit, to work in us and encourage us and help us as we wait

for Christ's return. When you don't think you have the words to pray, the Spirit will speak for us. When you are feeling hopeless and a bit lonely through this time, You are not without Your Lord. The Spirit will speak to you words of hope.

It is like the true story of Mary Cushman. Mary Cushman lived during the days of the Great Depression. Her husband worked for a paycheck of \$18 a week. He was prone to illness and often had to miss work.

Meanwhile, Mary was trying to raise five kids. She began to take in laundry and ironing, but it was barely enough. At one point, the grocer accused her 11-year old son of stealing. Mary Cushman had enough. She went into the room with her daughter and put on the gas heater in her bedroom, but didn't light it. She was ready to be done.

As she began to drift into sleep, she heard music. She had forgotten to turn off the radio. What she heard were these words, "What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear." As she listened to the words of "What a Friend we have in Jesus", she felt something wake her up. She knew she was making a huge mistake. She was trying to fight her battles alone, but she wasn't alone. She had Jesus. The Spirit was at work.

In the years following, Christ provided for her and blessed her and she later wrote, "As I look back on that terrible day when I turned on the gas, I thank God over and over that I "woke up" in time. What joys I would have missed."

You can know as you sit here. You live under a God who wants to give you hope and has given you hope in Christ. Do not despair, but trust that better days, eternal joys are what Christ wants you to have and He doesn't want you to miss a minute of it. Amen.