

19 July, 2020
Called to be Hope
Romans 8:12-25

It has been disappointing that we have had to go back into lockdown. I think it is harder this time than when it was first introduced. Last week when Nola was in Knox Private, I got to see her between 6-7pm for 4 nights but on midnight Thursday no visitors at all except with permission for critical ill patients. Our love and prayers are offered daily for members of our church family who are in nursing home facilities. It has been a very tough time for them, cut off, or limited access to family and friends.

I hope you are enjoying our studies in Romans. In particular chapter 8. This week we consider the second of three messages in this inspiring chapter. It begins in verse one with there is **no condemnation**, and ends with the assurance **that nothing can separate from the love of God in Christ Jesus** verse 39. Praise the Lord!

Please read our passage and write down three things that stand out to you.

If there was anything like a World Frustration Index, I would imagine it would be pretty high for 2020 at this stage. We have been stuck inside for weeks, wondering when this COVID-19 thing will end, if ever, and what the next pandemic might be.

We get entirely too much news, and most of it is frustrating: Political polarization, and feeling powerless to have any impact for change. Economic hopelessness for so many people, with no easy solutions. Social problems: drugs and crime, and social decay. Cultural breakdowns: lax moral and ethical standards, marriage, and loss of respect for authority. Religious freedom being challenged: Inequality: bullying, persistent racism, and oppression of the poor in the world. Natural disasters—and our powerlessness to fix things!

Frustration seems to be part of life, and it can be overwhelming at times. What gets us through it? HOPE: a belief in something better. A belief in a better future, that spills over into the present.

Where do we find hope? Paul talks about that in Romans 8:18-25.

WHAT SOLID BASIS DO WE HAVE FOR HOPE?

-GOD PROMISES TO REDEEM CREATION.

It will not always be like this! As v21 says, *“The creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.”*

Well, that sounds great, but if God plans to redeem the creation someday, why not do it immediately?

Paul hints at the answer, when he says, v19-21 *“The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.”*

“The creation waits for the children of God...” The redemption of creation—its liberation from bondage to decay—is inevitably linked with the redemption of God’s children, in freedom and glory.

Why? A redeemed creation is not a suitable home for unredeemed people.

Think about it: How could the world be free of frustration, if it were filled with human-caused frustration: economic inequality, greed, war, or bullying? So much frustration is human-caused. Well then, what about frustrations that are not human-caused? There are natural disasters, like pandemics, hurricanes, or earthquakes. There are troubles from natural causes: cancer, drought, disease and death.

Paul says something quite puzzling in v19: *“the creation was subjected to frustration...by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope...”* Who subjected the creation to frustration? Was it God, or another power? I don't think Paul settles that question, but he implies that if God allows frustration in the physical world, the PURPOSE of it is, “in hope that all of creation, including God's children, will be redeemed and brought in to “the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

Frustration has a purpose in our world.

A man once said that he didn't need God in his life. He said his life was good; he had a good business, a decent marriage and family, and lots of friends. His friend didn't know what to say, because he had been with him when the hospital pulled the plug on his dying 10-year-old daughter, and when his family retreated to a hotel room to drown their sorrows in beer. His friend could see stress in him, and even more in his family. He wanted to say, “Is this as good as it gets?”

Frustration with life can be a healthy, if it gives us a “holy discontent,” and a vision for something better.

As C.S. Lewis said in his essay, *The Weight of Glory*, *“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”*

Frustration with the world as it is makes us long for a new home—a new creation—a glorious creation liberated from decay, where we are free to be all God intends us to be.

- Frustration can be healthy. Imperfect love makes us long for perfect love.
- Fragile financial security drives us to trust God for true security.
- Crime and injustice help us desire better righteousness and justice.
- Frail bodies remind us that God has something better for us, as Paul reminds us in v23, *“we wait eagerly for...the redemption of our bodies.”*

God's plan and promises give us hope of a redeemed creation.

-GOD ADOPTS US AS HIS CHILDREN.

Romans 8:23 *“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies”.*

The NIV 2011 usually translates male terms, like “son,” as male and female, to reflect the intent of the authors in terms of today's culture. Here, however, the translators kept “sonship,” because the word was a technical term to describe the rights and privileges of a male heir. God gives us rights and privileges, as if we were his legal heirs! How did we get that status? God's adopted us.

Some people say, “We are all God's children,” since God created all of humanity in his image. Paul has something else in mind, however. In v14-17, he says, *“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*

As spiritual children of God, we share in the rights and privileges of God's one and only original Son, Jesus Christ! We are not like slaves, fearful of being cut off, but children, secure in the love of a parent. We have the right to call God “Father,” even “Abba,” a more familiar way of referring to God in the Aramaic language. (Paul inserted the Aramaic word, because it was so remarkable that Jesus used that word to speak to God.) We will share in the glory of Jesus Christ, while of course he is above all things in heaven and earth.

Tina, was adopted. Her experience growing up was one of confusion about what it meant to be adopted. One day, while at school in the second grade, Tina began to be teased about being adopted. When children do not understand something, it seems natural to make fun of it as a coping mechanism. (Perhaps children are not the only ones who react this way to misunderstandings.)

Tina went home in tears not knowing how to react to the other children telling her that her parents were not her real mom and dad. With large tears flowing down her cheeks, Tina walked in the back door of her home and was greeted by a worried mother. "What is wrong?" her mother asked. Tina told the story of being teased at school about not having real parents and not being as good as the other children because of it. Tina's wise mother took Tina into her loving arms and told her that all of those other children were born into their families and their parents had absolutely no choice about the kid they got, "But we got to pick you because you were so special," her mother said.

God adopted us as his children when we accepted Jesus and "received the Spirit of sonship." (Romans 8:15) Based on that, we are "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:17) Still, we wait eagerly to receive the full rights and privileges granted to us, when we arrive "home," to enjoy "our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8:23)

We can have hope, because God has a plan and purpose for us, he has adopted us as his own, and...

-THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US A TASTE OF OUR GLORIOUS FUTURE WITH GOD.

Verse 23 says that, "We have the first fruits of the Spirit," even while we groan and eagerly wait for full redemption of our own bodies, and all of creation.

When our redemption is complete, we will have perfect fellowship with God. We will be secure in our relationship as his adopted children. We will trust and obey him fully, and our minds and bodies will be totally aligned with his will for us.

We aren't there yet! The Holy Spirit in us gives us a taste of that, however. Verse 14 says we are "led by the Spirit," verse 15 says the Spirit of sonship allows us to call God our Father, and verse 16 says that the Spirit "testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

The word for "groaning" is repeated twice in today's text. In v22, Paul says, "the whole creation has been groaning." In v23, Paul says, "we groan inwardly as we wait..." Then, v26 Paul says the Holy Spirit "groans," expressing to God our frustrations, our requests, our hopes, and our deepest need for his grace.

God, through his Spirit, knows our hearts, shares our groaning, and enfolds us into his perfect plan and purpose for all things.

How do we deal with frustration in the world? How do we handle frustration with people, frustration with all of humanity, frustration with circumstances? How do we face our frustration with ourselves?

Hope. Hope is built upon a future that is already breaking through in the present. Hope is bringing the life of the future into the present, as we live in God's kingdom now.

All creation groans – for relief, for guidance, for miracles, for hope. And could it be that, in these very sounds of groans and cries, wherever and from whomever they come, God is reminding us that you and I, joint heirs with Christ, have been called to *be* hope?

"For creation waits," Paul writes, "*For the revealing of the children of God.*" It is a difficult thing for us to fathom. It is a difficult thing for us to embrace. It is a difficult thing for us to envision. Yet, it is inescapably there in almost every venue we wander into. The human spirit combining with God's Spirit to reveal that we are God's children still - heirs of the promise, co-workers in the building of a new creation, children equipped for hope unlike anything else in all of the created order. Sons and daughters imbued with a holy imagination and a tool chest full of skills to be agents of hope even against the greatest of odds.

It is our divine calling - to be hope, to live hope even as we know that hope is never easy. It isn't easy because it's always out there somewhere – unrealized, unmade, hard to sometimes imagine and even harder to cling to, especially in the midst of trial and frustration. Yet, as Paul reminds us, it's what hope has always been - hard to see but something that we wait for and work towards with patience and stubborn faithfulness.

The Name of Jesus is our Hope, and it is the name of Jesus that calls you and me to be hope!
To God be all the glory! Amen

Prayer.

Note:

The three things that caught my eye as I read this passage were;

- a) v14 *“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God”*
- b) v15 Adoption to sonship!
- c) v25 Hope