

## **“Waiting and Groaning”**

Liturgical Date: Proper 11 A

Primary Text: Romans 8:18-27

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, is the Epistle Lesson from Romans 8. When reading through this text, two words stood out to me: “waiting” and “groaning”. Forms of these words appear 3 times each in the passage. Thus, the title of the sermon is, “Waiting and Groaning”.

Indeed, the words “waiting” and “groaning” are often connected. When we are waiting, we often groan. When we are groaning, it is often because we are waiting. We go to an amusement park and want to try one of the rides, but the line is long-there may be waiting and groaning. We go to our favorite restaurant, but it is packed-waiting and groaning. We go to the bank to cash a check, but it is Friday and a lot people are there wanting to cash checks too-more waiting and groaning. We may groan in each of these situations as we wait, but if we think about it, the end result should be good: an enjoyable ride, a nice meal, and money. Perhaps if we focused on the end result, then we should groan less as we understanding waiting is sometimes a necessary part of receiving something good.

Thus verses 18-19 of Romans 8 opened our Epistle Lesson for today, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.”* Yes, life can be difficult while we wait on God. And much more than a momentary inconvenience, such as in the examples I gave you

a short time ago. A Christian may face persecution and challenge in this life. One may have to choose between keeping their job or compromising their Christian convictions. In many areas of the world, holding fast to a confession of faith in Jesus could even cost you your life. A Christian suffers from an incurable and painful illness, wondering when the Lord will call them home. A Christian may want to marry but is having trouble finding a spouse who also shares their Christian values, so they wait and wait. Yes, there is waiting-and sometimes we groan-as we live out our Christian life. But here the advice is that we are to look forward to the future glory. One day, God will call us home to His eternal kingdom where we enjoy Him and His people forever without pain, suffering, or hardship. And Jesus will return one day, perhaps even in our lifetimes, where all that is wrong will be set right for eternity. St. Paul echoes this same idea in other words that he penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For example, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”* And Paul knew a thing or two about facing sufferings and afflictions as a Christian, but he also knew to look forward to the future glory.

And why do we face such challenges in our lives? Why must we wait? Why do we groan? Simply put, it is due to sin. The world that we currently live in is fallen. It has been like that since that fateful fall in the Garden of Eden. Since Adam, we have all been born sinful. While original sin has its origin in Adam, we have plenty of sins that we commit too. And so do others. The evil that we see in the world, man’s inhumanity to man, is the result of sin. Murder, rape, theft,

lying and corruption, it is all due to acts of sin. And if we think about, many of the negative things in our life are due to things that we have done or not done as God has commanded. And this includes impatience. It has been accurately observed that when faith in God decreases, impatience increases.

But what about things like natural disasters? Although the world that we live in, even in its fallen state, is a beautiful place-it is also a deadly planet. And isn't it interesting that when many see something beautiful in the natural environment, they attribute it to "mother nature", but then when disaster strikes they are called (even in insurance policies) "acts of God." God gets little credit and a lot of blame from the sinful world. Drought strikes, crops fail, and people die. Fires, floods, earthquakes, and tornados all wreck destruction and take lives. There can be rockslides, blizzards, hurricanes, you name it. Now sometimes these things could be linked to direct sinful human action like an arsonist starts a fire or a bad governmental policy leads to famine, but often times these things just seem to happen. Does this have anything to do with sin? Actually, it does. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, we do well to not forget that the judgment that fell was not only on human beings, but on all of creation. Prior to original sin there were no natural disasters. No tornado, earthquake, or famine ever struck the Garden of Eden before sin. With the introduction of sin, everything changed-for the worse. Furthermore, people and animals and even animals and other animals got along prior to the Fall. Adam and Even did not have be concerned about being attacked and mauled by a lion. Nor would a gazelle be hunted and killed by a lion either. There was no death before sin. The Bible makes that very clear.

Our text for today clearly reminds us that the judgment of sin fell on all of creation. "It's a messed up world," people often like to say. They may mean

different things by this, but there is a general sense, even from secular people, that something is very wrong with the world-despite the beauty and kindness that God does mercifully show toward His creation. Something is wrong, people know. Another key word in this passage is “creation.” It is used 5 times from verses 19-23. Verse 22 begins with, *“For we know the whole creation has been groaning together...”*. But is God just talking about his creation of people? No, in verse 23 it draws a distinction between humans and the rest of creation, *“And not only the creation, but we ourselves...”*. Thus, we must not forget this important truth. All of creation is fallen and corrupted because of sin. God designed a perfect world, but when we sinned, it was shattered. Not only human beings, but the entire created system. Yes, by God’s grace it still “works” in that people live for a time and the scientific laws that God put into place function. But it is only a matter of time before things die or are destroyed due to the fallen nature of our planet.

So, people groan. All of creation groans. But it not a hopeless groaning, no it should not be. Because we are waiting. And by the fact that we are waiting, this means that we are waiting for something. We are waiting for the full restoration of what was lost in Eden. We are waiting for God to fulfill all that He has spoken. We have the promise of God that Jesus will return on the Last Day and that the devil, hell, and sin itself will be cast into the lake of fire to be no more. No more suffering. No more temptation. No more pain. No more death. A glorious day that will be. We wait in hope. Verses 24-25, *“For in this hope we were saved. 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.”* Those are wonderful and true words.

Backing up to verse 22 when it speaks of the groaning of creation it compares it to childbirth. Now, as a man I have never given birth and never will (although some today will tell you men can have babies!). Therefore, I can't speak from experience, but I have never met a woman who said that childbirth was easy. There was likely some groaning, perhaps very loudly, during the process! But the end result is worth it. A beautiful baby emerges from the womb. And if you have given birth or for us men who have been there after the birth of a child or grandchild, that moment when the mother snuggles that newborn to her face and smiles, that is a priceless moment. It took a long time to get there, 9 months of pregnancy and then perhaps hours of labor-but now the baby has been delivered and it is all worth it. This metaphor is used to show us the state we are in now. We are going through the pains and heartaches that come with life in this fallen world, but the result at the end is worth it-so worth it. We groan and wait like in pains of childbirth, but not without hope. Not without faith, which is what trusts in what we cannot yet see, but what has been promised by the one who never lies-God Himself.

As our text tells us we will be set free from bondage and corruption. We will obtain freedom as the children of God, we are adopted as sons and daughters, and our broken bodies are restored and redeemed.

This all sounds great, but is there anything for us in the meantime? Is there any comfort and blessing *during* this time of waiting? There certainly is. We take comfort in that Jesus has come the first time and did the will of the Father. He lived a perfect sinless life and kept the Law wholly in our place. Then He went to the cross and died for the sins of the world. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. In this sin, death, and the devil has been defeated. Our debt has been paid

and our place in the eternal kingdom of heaven secured. We await the Last Day when Jesus returns, and we fully see the glory of God. When times are tough, we turn to our faith in Jesus. We hear and read the Word of God and receive His forgiveness in Absolution and the Sacrament.

And there is more to this comfort in the waiting that we may not groan as those without hope. Jesus has ascended and sits at the right hand of the Father awaiting the trumpet blast and Second Coming. But Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them alone. He has sent the Comforter, the Holy Ghost. And the Spirit delivers the gifts of life and salvation won by Jesus. He indwells God's people. As verse 23 said, we are those, *"who have the firstfruits of the Spirit."* The Holy Spirit produces fruit, including patience in the hearts of believers as groan and wait. Verse 26, *"Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness."* We can't do this alone. Like the strike of a venomous snake, things like crime, cancer, and the cares of the world will come to try to bite us. But the Triune God is with us, specifically indwelling us with the Holy Spirit. We are weak, but He is strong. It is the living God within us during the wait that gives us hope and strength. Our attitude in the waiting and groaning is to be one of patience and anxious expectation.

And one of the greatest blessings that we have in this time of waiting is prayer. That we can go to God anytime, anywhere, and speak to Him about anything is an awesome privilege that we should never take for granted. Verses 26-27 close this passage with some great news. The Holy Spirit Himself intercedes for the saints. *"We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."* Wow! The Holy Ghost, God Himself, prays with us and for us. When we can't find the right words, God knows

our hearts, and the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf. What a comforting truth. We may forget to pray, but the Spirit never forgets to pray.

We wait. We may groan. But not without hope and faith. Because that which we are waiting on is so glorious, human words cannot even do it justice. I close with a quote from Luther as he preached on this text almost 500 years ago, *“Therefore, believers in Christ are to be confident of eternal glory, and with sighs and groans implore the Lord God to hasten the blessed day of the realization of their hopes.”*

Amen.