

## All Creation Waits

Romans 8:18-25

(preached July 7, 2024)

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Romans 8: 22-25*

Two words jump out at me from this passage. The first is CREATION — we just sang about creation and the mighty power of God ‘that made the mountains rise, that spread the flowing seas abroad and built the lofty skies.’ Creation – all around us, sun, moon, stars, and all the creatures including humans.

We are reminded in this ancient letter to the Christians in Rome that there is good news and not so good about creation!

1. **creation** waits – with eager longing
2. **creation** was subjected to futility- to the reality that things go wrong and that things come to an end
3. But...**creation** will be set free from its enslavement to decay
4. **creation** has been **groaning** together as it suffers **together** the pains of labor – something is waiting to be born.

Have you heard those groans of creation? Consider the headlines...

1. Flood waters have ravaged land and homes in the US – Minnesota, South Dakota, Florida, California- and around the world in Chile, Uruguay, Italy and Switzerland among many other places.
2. Summer 2023 was Earth’s hottest summer on record. AND in May 2024 earth marked 12 straight months of record setting heat somewhere on the planet. All creation groans!
3. Only days ago Hurricane Beryl became the earliest category 5 Atlantic hurricane on record going back 100 years. Scientists attribute this early storm to high ocean surface temperatures.
4. The United Nations published a sweeping report cautioning that of the estimated 8 million plant and animal species on the planet, 1 million are at risk of extinction, many within decades, because of human activities. All creation groans!

And we ourselves groan because it is frightening and overwhelming and every day seems to bring more news, more groans. It’s a lot to process. Human responses are mixed.

Some respond with denial - “there is no such thing as climate change. Reports are greatly exaggerated.”

Others recognize the problems but are so discouraged – after all, what can one person do? The problems are too many and too big.

Some folks are sincerely looking to address the problems and are activists for change. Some are just hoping for a quick fix and a way to get rich quick.

But if we listen to the groans of creation, if we listen to the wisdom of the creation, perhaps we can admit that we don’t have the will or the way to solve the difficult problems we face. And then other ways of responding open up.

Joanna Macy, a scholar of Buddhism, systems thinking and deep ecology writes this: “...until we can **grieve** for our planet we cannot love it—grieving is a sign of spiritual health. But it is not enough to weep for our lost landscapes.... Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair.”

Creation – Grief – Wounds – Wonder - Joy

Those are sacred words...The church has always spoken about these things and helped people to express them. Now these sacred words are needed in new ways. As we learn from creation and one another, as we work to care and heal, we must also learn to repent and grieve - to admit that humans have made a mess of things; to confess that we have harmed the air and water and mountains and the creatures and ourselves.

The church can help people to confess because we have the hope of forgiveness. The church can help people to acknowledge that we are part of creation but **we did not make the world**. The church can help people love and show gratitude, wonder and joy for creation and the Creator. And the church can lift up hope.

I began this reflection by saying that **2** words stand out in this passage. The first we have spent some time with -CREATION – The second prominent word is HOPE. Paul wrote:

“<sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do **not** see, we wait for it with patience.”

The church has always offered hope, hope given us in Jesus Christ. We can offer hope to a groaning creation through proclaiming the words of scripture and our faith in Jesus the Christ. There are **many** ways to do that. The Bible is a big book ! I will offer 3 –

1. That old familiar passage John 3: 16 – ‘God so loved the world’ - The original Greek word was KOSMOS. God loves the cosmos !! God LOVES creation - God called it Good and sent Jesus to give the Kosmos abundant life. That’s hopeful.

2. A second source of hope goes back to the Hebrew scriptures, to the book of Job. (12: 7-10)

<sup>7</sup> “But ask the animals, and they will teach you,  
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;

<sup>8</sup> ask the plants of the earth,<sup>[a]</sup> and they will teach you,  
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

<sup>9</sup> Who among all these does not know  
that the hand of the LORD has done this?

<sup>10</sup> In God’s hand is the life of every living thing  
and the breath of every human being.”

Our hope resides in the One who made heaven and earth, who dreams and plans for a peaceful cosmos for all creatures.

And our hope resides in our relationship as children of God. This morning’s passage stated:

<sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, **but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope** <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Too often that membership in God’s family has been very exclusive and to be ‘children of God’ meant following strict and coded rules and judgments. Only certain kinds of religious followers were eligible. But consider this. **We show that we’re God’s adopted children by taking on the work that God gave our first parents – Adam and Eve - the task of caring for God’s creation.**

Suppose God’s children are revealed when **anyone** is working to alleviate creation’s groaning-- when **anyone** is caring for everything God has created--when **anyone** is tending the wounded and grieving and the lonely and the fearful the way Jesus did when he walked upon this earth. As Jesus was the child of God, so whoever acts in his ways are his siblings, and therefore, children of God.

In HOPE we are saved. We in the church have a lot of hope to share with a world that needs our care. May we respond to the groans of creation with the hope that is ours in Christ.

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