

**Romans 8:18-25. (NIV '84)** *<sup>18</sup> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup> The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not 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. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

### **Summer Sermon Series - The Book of Romans:**

#### **The Basics of the Christian Faith, One Word at a Time: Longing**

It seems to be a staple scene that is included in more than a few war movies. A soldier takes a solitary moment to breathe in deeply as he yearns for home; he takes a longing look at a photograph or he flips through letters from family. Sometimes the scene includes several soldiers who together hash out what they are longing to see, to experience. The soldier longs to see his family, to hold his wife, to meet his newborn son, to lie in his own bed, to eat a favorite meal, to drink a favorite beverage. And with a deep breath, a groan, a grunt, or a sigh, everything around him fades away for few moments; he sighs before he puts his helmet back on, takes up his weapon, or returns to his post. But this longing for something much better leaves him with a wistful grin, with relief, with that glimmer of hope that makes the pressure of the moment much more bearable.

In our sermon series for today we move from the word battling to the word longing. Last week we talked about the battle against sin, the internal struggle of good vs. evil; the old self vs. the new self that we have through faith. As Christians, we are daily engaged in this spiritual warfare that leaves us weary and worn. And in our weary state we are delighted to hear the voice of Jesus inviting us, ***Come to me... and I will give you rest.*** He is with us and his presence blesses us with rest and relief and peace. Through word and sacrament our Lord relieves and revives his children.

And that is what we are, by God's grace we are children of God. Enemies of God we are saved, converted, turned around and made to be at one with God. We are redeemed forgiven, restored, and love. Adopted by grace, we are sons and daughters of the king and we have been graciously given this incredible and unexpected and undeserved gift; we are heirs of an everlasting inheritance. And this inheritance includes a place in our Father's house, a place prepared for us in the holy palace, the heavenly mansion, that Jesus has made ready for us, for you and for me.

With unspeakable groans, he cried out to his Father as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he went about the Father's saving plan. In agonizing tones, he cried out as he stretched out his arms in love, so that we might be rescued separation from God and the moans of hopelessness. His body lying on that slab of stone and at God's direction breath and life rushed back into lifeless frame and he rose from the dead to give us a living hope. He rescued us, redeemed us, and made us his own. And so, as children of God, sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father, thanks to Jesus we are now **longing** for the day when God will call us home.

Today, therefore, we pour over this letter of encouragement that our Father has had written for us and **we are reminded of the hope that we have; and we are encouraged to wait patiently for this hope to be fulfilled.**

The battle against sin is only one aspect of the difficulties, the sufferings, that we daily face while living in this world of sin. But as bad as things may get, this is the holy encouragement that Paul delivers for believers of all time. ***I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*** The Roman Christians would have faced persecution and trouble and pain of all sorts. Their lives were threatened, their daily lives made difficult, simply because of their connection to Christ. And on top of the specific problems and troubles that these Christians and this congregation had to face Paul speaks in universal terms of how life in this world can be so generally difficult and troublesome. He expands our view from our present sufferings to include the effect that the curse of sin has had on the entirety of creation. ***20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,***

Life can be tough. It can be stressful. There are days when one thing goes wrong and it ruins the rest of the day. There are days when nothing seems to go right. Life can be ugly and difficult and frustrating. But should we be surprised? Just look at the world around you. We are broken and so is the world around us. We are sinners living in a sinful world. Should it really surprise us that we are groaning under the weight of illness and disease, trouble and sorrow, when the entire world is groaning under the same weight of sin. When sin came into this world thorns and thistles infested the ground and work became difficult, all of life was marked and marred by sin and death. But, remember how Paul reminded us of God's plan in all of this. ***20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*** After mankind fell into sin, this was God's plan. He had a plan to save his people through Jesus, his life, and death, and resurrection, and in the end he has a plan to restore and liberate his people along with all of creation when Jesus comes again. God was the one that subjected creation to frustration, to remind each and every resident of this earth of our brokenness, our need for restoration, and to instill in us a longing for someplace better. The very world around us and the troubles and the pains of this world, the frustrations of life living here remind us that this is not our true home. God in his mercy blesses us in this life as he cares for our daily needs. In this world that still very much shows signs of his wonder, his amazing and perfect power there are also signs of sin. Right alongside the beautiful signs of God's life-giving power and his abundant goodness, creation also bears these obvious scars from sin. A person can go out in his garden and find ripe beautiful tomatoes but that standing in that same garden, that same person can find another tomato that is rotting and full of decay and death. Flies buzz about to feed on the mess; and creation groans.

Creation itself displays these signs of frustrations in subtle and more obvious tones. A beautiful mountain range sits on the edge of a massive crack, a fault, and God's wondrous creation shakes and cracks and the earth quakes and groans under intense pressure. The brilliant blue skies are suddenly smothered by a frightening mass of clouds that form a deadly funnel and the world groans and those terrible winds whip and whirr. Rain just doesn't come, and the ground cracks and fruits of the field wither and crinkle and the dust breathes out its raspy groan. This world is broken and the signs are all around us. This world has been subjected to frustration. We can see it all around us.

This is the reality of living in a sinful world, and how terribly sad it is that there are plenty of people who think that this world is all there is. This is it and there is nothing more to hope for; this is the best that we will ever know. Such unbelief enslaves a person to a futile and hopeless existence. And so, for many people the only hope that can muster is to try to enjoy the beauties of the creation, the joys of life, because this is the best that we will ever know. No wonder many people struggle

mightily to deal with the difficulties of life especially when they seem to outweigh the joyous parts. If there is no hope beyond this world, the pains of this life would lead us to believe that is a sorry existence that is often too difficult bear. It is this view of life that leads many into despair. However, as Christians we have been blessed with this perspective given to us by God's Word. <sup>22</sup> ***We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*** The beauties of creation remind us of the grace of God and the twisted frailties and the signs of death testify that this world is broken beyond repair. But God in his grace gives us this blessed hope as he tells us in his word that one day this broken world will be replaced, renewed, restored to its original glory. We don't know what exactly this will look like, but we know by faith that this perfect place will be our home for all eternity. And it is a place that is so perfect, so peaceful, so joyful, that it goes far beyond our imagination or understanding. No mourning, no crying, no pain, just peace.

This is the hope that we have: we will one day be with God in the perfection of the new heavens and the new earth. And we won't even remember the pains of this world. We will be set free from the daily frustrations and burdens of sin. We will be set free from sin and death and the problems of this existence and we will be liberated to live with God and the whole church of God, the family of God, in perfect harmony and peace. To give us a picture, a taste of this coming joy, God tells us that creation itself will demonstrate this glorious redemption. When that final redemption of mankind comes. God will set free his own creation, restoring it to its former glory. No more death no more decay, all of that will all be gone and forever left behind. The apostle Peter describes in graphic terms the end of this present world and the revealing of the new. He speaks of the elements melting in the heat, and how the new heavens and the new earth will emerge just as God has promised. In the book of Revelation, we are given a number of stunning pictures of the coming glory to consider, and one such picture describes the tree of life bringing forth fruit all 12 months out of the year. Not a single sign of death, not even a season of sorrow or illness or pain, but instead there will only be uninterrupted joy and peace

In this description, here in Romans chapter 8, Paul personifies and makes personal this restoration that goes beyond our imagination. ***The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*** <sup>22</sup> ***We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*** Paul expresses this God given confidence that although life may be difficult, and daily hardship and pain may come, but these are merely signs that something better is about to come. Here Paul compares our present sufferings to something like birth pains which while difficult are bearable because of the coming joy. Paul is also careful in his description to keep the center of the glorious truth focused on God's grace to his people. This will not just be an earth shattering event that reshapes the landscape of creation but this will be an event that reflects and accompanies God's glorious liberation of his people.

God in his love promises liberation from this world of sin, and this is what we long for. As the earth groans, as the signs of death and decay, haunt and cripple and scar the landscape of this world, so we too suffer through the cruelties of life in a sin-infested world. Such pains scar the landscape of our daily lives. And so we groan when it is apparent that our lives our subject to frustration, when plans fail, when expectations are not met, when illness attacks, when bones break, when cancer brings pain upon our friends our siblings, our parents, our spouse, our neighbor, our hearts ache, when death and sadness, and sorrow comes. We groan as pain wreaks havoc on own personal frame and emotional suffering inwardly takes it tool. We groan when hearts ache. We groan when terrible things happen, things that are horrible proof that this world is so painfully fractured by the curse of sin.

With a sigh, with a groan, we groan, we cry, as we bear witness to another terrible example trouble and the frustration of this world. Maybe some of you heard about the terrible tragedy shook

a community in Illinois. My sister teaches at a school in Crete, IL and she called me the other night. She had found out that day that a young woman from her congregation was driving her kids to Vacation Bible School when their vehicle was struck by another car that had failed to stop at a country intersection. This young woman, who was pregnant with her fourth child, died at the scene, and eventually all the children died as well. The horrible accident left the husband and the father of this young family grieving this terrible loss. This man is aching under the weight of sin and death. Our brothers and sisters in the faith who belong to this WELS congregation, the members of this community, and all those who hear of this news, we groan under the weight of sin and sadness.

But even in this case of incredible sadness and pain, there is hope. There is hope in the joy of heaven. These children, this woman, have been delivered from all evil, as they now have been called to their heavenly home. On that fateful day they were not only on their way to VBS they were on their way to heaven. Far away from pain and sadness, far away from any more human error, sin, and death, this woman and her children have been welcomed to their heavenly home. There is hope even in this terrible situation. The same hope that all believers have. The same hope that Job confessed. By faith even Job was able to cry out in his terrible misery this beautiful expression of the hope that we all have in Christ, ***I know that my Redeemer lives and in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes – I and not another. How my heart yearns within me! – Job 19:25-27.*** Those who believe in Jesus are given the gift of eternal life and with that gift comes a longing to for our true home with our Savior. With him in eternity there will be no more pain, no more trouble, or frustration, no more human error, no more sin or temptation; no more darkness of sorrow and death. This is the sure and certain expectancy that each of God's children have through faith in God and his promises. This is the coming glory that sustains us through times of blessing and times of suffering: through faith in Jesus, we know that we have been made children of God and we have been given a home in heaven and God will take us there when he determines that the time is right. And until then he has given us his gift of the Holy Spirit as a deposit, as a guarantee that heaven is our home and we will be there with all those who have died in faith, with all the saints in heaven, and with our LORD and Savior, our God and Father. Paul assures us of this wonderful truth with these words. ***23 Not 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. 24 For in this hope we were saved.***

Heaven is ours, but we certainly don't live there, just yet. But our LORD writes his letters of assurance, he sends us pictures in his word and through his gift of the sacraments that remind us of the hope that we have; and this is a hope that will certainly be fulfilled. For all those who are in Christ Jesus we have a home in heaven. We will be given our full inheritance. We will be given that place where we will be granted a glorious reunion with those who have died in faith. And blessed with the gift of faith in Jesus our Savior we patiently wait for this unmatched treasure of heaven. With a sigh, we groan under the weight of the burdens of the day, but by faith we recall that something great is coming, something so great that it is not even worth comparing to the present sufferings that we endure. No matter how difficult, no matter how painful, it is not worth comparing to the eternal joy that is coming. Longing for the glory that will be fully revealed for the children of God, we cling to the hope that we have, a hope of eternal glory and bliss that will be fulfilled and realized at the time of God's choosing. Therefore, we wait, longing for our home in heaven; waiting patiently we trust in our God and Father who so graciously gives us this gift through Jesus. Amen.