

Romans 8:18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³ 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. ²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

We Believe: And The Greatest of These Is...

Romans 8:18-25

In this final sermon of our series on what we Presbyterians believe, we come full circle: faith, what we believe, is more than saying a set of ideas are true. I have tried in this sermon series to show that what we believe is much more than a simple list of theological concepts. What we believe...our faith...is the rock upon which we build our lives; the foundation for everything we do, and it engages with our daily lives.

First Corinthians 13:13 may be the best-known verse of the Bible: *So faith, hope and love abide...but the greatest of these is, of course, love.* I'm not going to disagree with Paul's assertion that the greatest of these is love, but I would like to make a case for faith and hope being a close second.

Marcus Borg has a great chapter in one of his books in which he talks about what it means to have faith. One of the most important points he makes is that faith isn't just saying we affirm certain ideas to be true. **Faith is trust.** Faith as trust is like floating in a deep ocean: "If you struggle, if you tense up and thrash about, you will eventually sink. But if you relax and trust, you will float. It's like Matthew's story of Peter walking on the water with Jesus—when he began to be afraid, he began to sink..." When you are teaching a small child to swim, the hardest part is getting the child to relax in the water. You keep saying, "It's okay, just relax. You'll float, it's okay." When they discover it is true, everything changes. They stop sinking and begin to float...and began to enjoy it. Faith is trusting in the buoyancy of God. It's okay, just relax. You'll float.

The opposite of this kind of faith, then, is not doubt or disbelief, but *mistrust*, and mistrust leads to anxiety and worry. Think of the number of times Jesus equates faith with the absence of worry or fear.

Consider the birds of the air, he says. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet God feeds them...Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. Over and over Jesus repeats: "Do not worry...Do not be anxious...Do not be afraid." Relax. God will lift you up. You'll float.

Borg even goes so far as to say that we "can measure our degree of faith as trust by the amount of anxiety in our lives. I mention this not to provide yet one more failing for which to chastise ourselves, but because of the good news implicit in this realization. Growth in faith as trust casts out anxiety. Who of us would not want a life with less anxiety, to say nothing of an anxiety-free life? If we were not anxious, can you imagine how free we would be, how immediately present we would be able to be, how well we would be able to love? Faith as radical trust has great transforming power."¹

When faith as trust reduces the anxiety we feel, the hope we feel increases proportionately. When anxiety goes down, hope goes up. Anxiety sees the future as filled with negative things. When we start trusting God, the future becomes a place of positive things.

When we trust that God is sovereign and that all things are ultimately under his control, we stop worrying and start hoping.

When we trust God's grace to cover our sins, we stop worrying and start hoping.

When we trust in God's providence, that he is at work in our lives, knowing what we need and providing it, we stop worrying and start hoping.

When we trust that God answers prayer, we stop worrying and start hoping.

When we trust that Jesus was both fully human and fully God and came to remove our sins from us as far as east is from west, we stop worrying and start hoping.

When we trust that Jesus is Lord,

that the Holy Spirit is at work within and among us,

when we trust that the church is Christ's Body at work in the world,

and when we trust that Jesus is going to return and transform this broken and hurting world into the reign and realm of God,

we stop worrying and start hoping.

Of course that isn't easy to do. Friends and family members still get life-threatening or life-taking diseases, as we heard from Maria a few minutes ago. Terrorism takes lives almost every day. Hunger and homelessness surround us.

¹ Borg, Marcus J. (2009-03-17). *The Heart of Christianity* (Kindle Locations 536-557). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

But Paul's words from Romans 8 give our answer: *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.*

Those aren't naive words. Paul knows what the sufferings of this present world are all about. As he says elsewhere, he has suffered for his faith.

Five times he received from the Jews 39 lashes.

Three times he was beaten with rods.

Once he received a stoning.

Three times he was shipwrecked; for a night and a day he was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from his own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea...hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.

But, still he says, *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.* Paul knew suffering. But, compared to the glory about to be revealed to us, there's no comparison. The suffering is real; the grief is real; but the trust is real, too. God's rule is real, and so is our hope in him. Jesus' victory over death is real, and so is our hope in him.

Paul says that creation groans in agony, we groan in agony. But then he says, it isn't just groaning in pain. Those are *labor* pains as we await the birth of a new realm, a new kingdom, a new glory, a new world about to be revealed. When we don't just believe it, but *trust* it, we worry less and hope more.

As Richard Mouw so powerfully says, "*The world has not seen the last of Jesus of Nazareth. He is coming again.*"² And when he does, he will bring with him a new Jerusalem, a new kingdom that is a light to the nations, a kingdom in which there is no temple because God lives among his people; a kingdom in which there is no night because there is no darkness, no suffering, no death, no mourning or weeping, for the former things will have passed away. *We know how this story ends*, and so whatever happens in the meantime, we know it will not be the last word.

But the news gets better. Not only does Jesus promise that he will return one day, he promises that he is already here with us now. Not only does he tell us that the kingdom of God is *coming*, he says that *it is among us right now*. He tells us that he is with us until the end of this age and the beginning of the new age.

I will ask the Father, and he will give you the Spirit of truth, to be with you forever. You know him, because he lives in you.

Jesus is not only coming, his Spirit is here, working to bring good out of evil, healing out of brokenness, life out of death. Life is terribly difficult, but we trust in a God who offers second and third chances; who offers grace. We trust in a God for whom death is not the last word, resurrection is.

We trust, we believe, and so we have hope.

In the midst of one of the most painful campaign seasons any of us has witnessed, with poll after poll saying that what most people want more than anything is a better choice, I recently read this powerful reminder from Max Lucado.

I have a prediction. I know exactly what November 9 will bring. Another day of God's perfect sovereignty. He will still be in charge. His throne will still be occupied. God will still manage the affairs of the world. Never before has God's providence depended on a king, president, or ruler. And it won't on November 9, 2016.

When we say we believe, we aren't listing ideas we agree with. We are declaring our faith in, our *trust* in the God who created this world and has promised that this present suffering is not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us when these labor pains are over and a new world is born. It isn't just a motto, it is the most essential declaration of our lives: *In God we trust. In Jesus Christ we hope. In the Holy Spirit we find strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow.*

In the end it isn't even really about how great our faith is, it is all about how great is God's faithfulness toward us.

Amen and amen.

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² Richard Mouw in William C. Placher, ed., (2003-10-31). *Essentials of Christian Theology*. Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition. 2003, p. 343.