

Rom. 8:12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!”¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

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 hope²¹ 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.

July 23, 2017

What We Don't See is What We Get!

Romans 8:12-25

There's an old saying, "It's not *what* you know that counts, it's *who* you know." It must contain at least a kernel of truth because most all of us have seen colleagues with minimal talent rise to undeserved levels of success because they spend lots of time making connections and stroking the egos of their superiors.

But, the truth is, having connections does not guarantee life will be easier. I discovered this week that there is a website that actually measures the level of impact you have on the internet. It's called Klout.com, with a "K" and it gives you a score between 1-100 that measures how much, well, *clout* you have by your presence on social media. It made me curious enough to check it out, after all I am active on Facebook, Wordpress, Twitter, Instagram, even Snapchat. The average Klout score is 40, so, I'm thinking I might have a decent amount of Klout. Turns out my score, on a scale of 1 to 100, is 10. Kind of humbling. Not much clout there, with a "C" or a "K".

But, Paul tells us in our scripture reading this morning that we do have some pretty good connections. *When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.* We are the adopted children of the Creator of the universe, heirs of God and joint-heirs of Jesus Christ. If it's about who you know, we're in pretty good shape, because you can't get much better-connected than that. Being able to say that the God of All Things is our adopted father should give us some clout.

Paul tells us that those connections, however, don't guarantee that life will be easier, despite what some of the prosperity preachers tell us. *...we are children of God...heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him....* ***Adoption into the household of God is not an elevation to privilege, except the privilege to suffer with Christ.*** This is a hard thing for many people to accept: the privilege into which we are adopted is not the privilege of an easy life, but the privilege of sharing in the suffering of our adopted brother, Jesus Christ.

Life is hard. As Anne Lamott recently put it, "Life is a precious, unfathomably beautiful gift, and it is impossible here. It is filled simultaneously with heartbreaking sweetness and beauty, desperate poverty, floods and babies and acne and Mozart, all swirled together. I don't think it's an ideal system."¹

Another writer put it this way: *"Even if one is optimistic and sees the glass half full, it is still a long way from a cup running over."*² For Paul, the "sufferings of this present time" include not only human suffering, but the suffering of Creation, as well.

Sometimes people will say that all you have to do is look at the world and you can see the goodness and glory of God, but there's a lot of groaning in creation. This earth is not a peaceful place, even without the impact we humans have had on it. Storms and floods, earthquakes and volcanoes, ice ages that change to tropical ages; species becoming extinct, not to mention asteroids colliding with the earth, threatening to eliminate all but the simplest life on the planet. When Paul says that creation groans, his words have never been more relevant than they are today.

And there's no question that we humans know suffering. You don't even have to turn on the news, just look around the room, look at the names on our prayer lists, no family goes unscathed for long. I've read statistics that say one-third of us are going through a crisis at any given time, and I think that's an underestimation.

Life. Is. Hard. And if you and I are living as the adopted siblings of Christ, we're not going to experience less suffering, we're going to experience more, just as Christ did. *We are joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him....*

And yet. And yet. That's only part of what Paul says. The rest is, so that we may also be glorified with him. We are children of God; we are children of suffering; and we are children of hope.

Paul does an amazing thing when he talks about the suffering, the travail of creation and humankind. Did you catch what this groaning means we are all doing here? What is the one kind of suffering women have been willing to undergo (and men have been willing to let women undergo) since the beginning of

¹ https://www.ted.com/talks/anne_lamott_12_truths_i_learned_from_life_and_writing/transcript

² David Greenhaw in Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown. *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 3, Pentecost and Season after Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16)* (Kindle Locations 9159-9160). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

time? The groaning, the travail, the pain of childbirth. And we know the reason why: because of what is produced by that suffering. There is hope in the pain of childbirth, because the suffering is not meaningless; it is not pointless. Something precious and amazing and wonderful comes from the suffering.

That's what Paul means when he says that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory about to be revealed to us. I learned a long time ago not to tell a woman in labor that the pain she was going through was nothing compared to the joy she will experience, but I've also never known a mom who did not eventually feel that way. Even in the midst of the pain, most moms know that it will be worth it – they just don't want to hear it from a man! This assurance that the pain is not meaningless, that joy comes in the morning, is the hope on which we base our faith.

Paul says in another of his letters that if the Christian faith were about the world as it is and life as it is, we would be the most pitiful religion ever. We don't promise much for the present. The world as it is, our lives as they are, are, at best, a glass half-full. If what we see is what we get, we have a pretty pitiful religion. It is the hope on which our faith is based that makes the difference.

What is this hope? It begins with the conviction that God is working God's purpose out, even when appearances suggest differently. God is here, God's Spirit is among us, there is a plan and that plan will come to fulfillment. In that plan the day will come when the labor pains will end and a new world will be born. A world where evil no longer exists; where greed no longer exists. When Christ returns this world will be transformed into a new heaven and a new earth, and we will be transformed into people at peace with each other and at peace within ourselves.

Our hope is so much bigger than what most of us have been taught – that when we die we go to heaven. God's plan is so much bigger than that – it includes that, but it is so much bigger than that. Isaiah 11 paints the picture beautifully:

*The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.*

*The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.*

*They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.*

Hope says what we do NOT yet see is what we will get. *We suffer with Christ so that we may also be glorified with him.* This is not just meaningless suffering, this is labor pains; not just groaning, but groaning with the pangs of a new world, of new bodies that don't break down or become diseased, a new heaven and a new earth in which there is no injustice, no poverty, no politics, no war. That is the world for which we wait. What we do NOT see is what we will get. *Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

The attitude Paul describes is more than just waiting. It is patient, but also active. Like parents preparing a room for their yet-to-arrive baby. Some translations say that we wait on tiptoe for what we do not yet see to arrive. Sometimes when we go to Boone to visit our son, our two-year-old granddaughter will go out on the back deck to watch for us. The road that comes to Josh and Kelly's comes down a hill and you can see the top of the hill from their back deck, so you can see who is coming before they arrive. Rachael will stand on the back deck, on tiptoe, watching for Giddy's truck. She knows that when she sees Giddy's truck for just a second at the top of the hill, in just a few minutes, Grandma and Giddy will walk in the house. She waits with eagerness because she wants to see her Grandma and Giddy, but she waits with patience because she knows it will happen.

It is not for this world alone that we hope. We hope for what we do not yet see. We wait on tiptoe, confident, eager, and patient all at the same time. For we are children of God, joint heirs with Jesus, if we are willing to suffer with him that we also might be glorified with him.