

“O Spirit, Help Us Find Hope”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
John Knox Presbyterian Church – August 16, 2015

Romans 8:22-27 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 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 is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

It was about 2 months ago when a man came into the church wanting to speak to a pastor. Frank was off that day. So, I sat down with this gentleman in the main hallway. Fortunately, it was quiet. He found himself lost. He thought the church might be able to help. He had hurt a lot of people including his mother who was living with him. He was not proud of the way he had acted. He saw no way out and was thinking about killing himself. I suggested that he see a counselor or check into a hospital as they could help with him wanting to end his life. We talked for about 45 minutes. Before he left, I offered to pray with him. This is when I was astonished. He said, “No, he didn’t think God would want to hear from him. He didn’t think God would want to have anything to do with him. He didn’t think God cared about him.” I asked him, if he knew who Jesus is. He said, “Yes, he knew.” I told him that it was people just like him that Jesus spent much of his time with on earth. I told him about the woman at the well who had 7 husbands and about Zacchaeus who Jesus chose to have dinner with that night after he pulled him down from the tree. This man had no idea how much God loved him. He had no idea that he was a child of God.

I wished this man would have known about this scripture in Romans because the people in the church in Rome are having a very similar identity crisis. They have forgotten who they are. And more importantly, they have forgotten whose they are. Paul is writing to them to tell them that they are children of God! They may have struggles on their new found faith journeys. We all have challenges. Many times those challenges can cause severe pain. This pain can be as painful as child birth! Many mothers can testify to this pain! In the midst of our groaning we wait for our adoption from God, when God will claim us. It is at this point that we will inherit all God’s riches.

Growing up with parent’s who cared for foster children; I know how important adoption is to a child. It was my brother, Jon, who came to us at the age of 3 months old. He was with us for 5 years when the Social Services and my parents started talking about adoption. Jon came from a family of 5 children and he was the youngest. His biological father decided to take all the children back into his home except for Jon. He knew that Jon had been in our home the entire time and all he knew was us. He was willing to give him up for adoption so that he could be a part of our family. I remember my mother saying that we

needed to pray in hopes that his biological father would not change his mind. What would that mean for Jon if he were no longer a part of our family?

Fortunately, God's plan was for us to adopt him. He was always told that he was special because we made the choice to adopt him! We chose him to be in our family! He inherited everything including our love. My parents took on a huge commitment as Jon was a very difficult child. He had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and struggled with alcohol and drug addiction. There were many times they had to use tough love, but my parents never gave up on him. My brothers, my parents and I did not always understand the things that he did but we never stopped loving him. The most important thing was that God never stopped loving him!

God never stops loving us. Our ultimate adoption from God will come when we will experience our death and resurrection and will inherit all God's riches. But for now, we wait. As God's children we must know that we are loved and made free through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul wants us to remember that because of that love and freedom we can find hope. This is not the kind of hope when we hope that the Colts will win their practice game against the Eagles today or that they win the Super Bowl. This is when life is so difficult and things seem hopeless. This is when we find ourselves overwhelmed by life. This is when we have hit rock bottom. So, where do we find this kind of hope especially if we can't see anyway out?

Yesterday, I asked Mary Carter if she would mind sharing her thoughts with me about this very question. Many people in our congregation have experienced many struggles and great challenges. But, Mary and Jerry have been through so much this past year. No one would have ever dreamed that it would have taken so long for Jerry to recover from both his surgeries. Yes, Jerry has had to spend long days and months in the hospital and put in hours of physical therapy. But, I wanted to seek Mary's perspective on how she as the caregiver, the spouse remained hopeful in those very, very difficult times. Especially, where there was no way to see hope.

Mary says it was her faith that came first, and then it was their family and friends that gave support. It would be the doctors that would come into the room and give her the reality of the situation, and then friends and family would lend hope where there wasn't any.

She remembers Pastor Debbie Grohman one time ending the worship service with the challenge to the congregation to go through the week seeking the face of God. That is what Mary did. Every time things were bad she would receive a card or a message that came at the perfect time and gave her the perfect words. It was though God was speaking through others.

Mary found hope in the people who she would meet in the hospital lounge or in the halls of the hospital. They all had loved ones that were going through challenging health issues.

They would share their stories with each other and that gave support as they were walking very similar journeys.

Mary remarked that the biggest thing that gave her hope was when she gave up control and gave it to God! Realizing that she had no control over the situation and that it all was in the hands of God made a huge difference! She also adds this took a lot of patience and prayer! I think we can all relate to this. **We many times want things right now. We want answers! If we can't have it right away, we at least want to know how long it will be before we get it! This is extremely difficult for all of us!**

It also took a lot of patience when it came to her expectations. There were times when she had to realize that what she expected and what Jerry was able to do were entirely different. She had to let go and know that it was going to be done in Jerry and God's time. God did! We are thankful for Jerry and his amazing recovery. I give thanks to Mary for sharing with us.

Paul closes this scripture by saying that the Spirit of God will know what we need in the midst of our weakness. In the times of our lives when we are truly struggling, the Spirit will intercede. It knows exactly what our prayers should be and it will provide what God wills for our lives. That may not be what we want but it will be what God wants for our lives.

I close now with a prayer that Mary shared with me. She received this from a friend at a time when Jerry's health had taken a terrible turn. Her friend's husband had severe health issues and this prayer helped her. Mary said this was a constant companion with her this last year. Let us pray: **Dear God, still my tongue, replace useless words with silent understanding. Let compassion be my guide as I offer help and healing with only my presence and my prayers. I pray that I will know when to speak and when not to. May my support be felt without uttering a single syllable. Amen.**