

Pastor T.C. Arnold
4th Sunday after Trinity
Romans 8:18-23
June 23rd, 2013

In the early morning hours a fire broke out in an apartment building trapping a number of families. With the hallways ablaze and filled with smoke, a family waited frantically for rescuers to reach them from an outside window. In their efforts to protect the children, the parents were almost overcome with smoke. The two children, horrified with such an experience, stood on their tiptoes peering through the window watching the rescue operation below. In these horrible moments of waiting their great and exciting hope was that the rescuers would reach them – in time. They watched, as they waited, and emotionally labored with every move of the rescue team until they were finally snatched from the trap of death. Their confident, watchful waiting had helped to prevent them from a foolish dash onto the stairway or leap from the window – which would have meant certain death.

This example is horrifying to think about. However, it is something of a picture of all of life in this world. People and all living things see death and destruction all around them. All of life seeks deliverance, a rescuer, a way out of the dilemma. All of us are standing, waiting and hoping to see some rescue apparatus functioning that will enable us to believe that deliverance is sure and near in the midst of our sufferings.

Our text talks about waiting for God in the midst of suffering. It says in verse 19, *“The creation waits with eager longing...”* It says in verse 22 that, *“The whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth.”* (I think Paul uses the illustration of “childbirth” because any of us – even men – can at least realize to a small degree – that this kind of suffering in life really is painful). Waiting for the Lord in sufferings is hard. We wonder, why not now, Lord? Why don’t you deliver me today? I am faithful. I have suffered enough. But still we hear from Psalm 27, *“Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord.”*

Easier said than done... be strong and wait... take courage and wait. I think this is harder for Christians than anyone else. The non-believer is not seeking deliverance from God, but we are. We know God delivers from sufferings, but in our sins we desire not to wait. We don’t like pain and if God is the almighty and all powerful Lord that He says He is, we won’t have to wait. At least, that is the way we feel about it. How long, oh Lord, how long?

People ask me, “How long... until we get 72nd St. fixed.” Our sufferings are extreme, having to use the detour. I say, “They tell me until August, perhaps later.” We respond, “That’s too long.” I agree. Even when man is able to give a date when sufferings are going to end, relief is rarely “on time.” Something happens and the construction takes longer than expected. God gives no dates – and “on time” to us is right now. But God says, “wait.” Wait on whom? Wait on the Lord. His time.

Beloved in the Lord, I know it is hard, but wait patiently on the Lord in the midst of your sufferings. Why should you? Two reasons: first, His time is always the right time even when we think His timing is wrong. Secondly, our Lord waits patiently for you. He takes the chief of sinners – and that is what Paul calls himself to pastor Timothy, but it also describes you and me, and with patient love waits for us. In our unbelief, God waits in patient love for you. In taking that job of being “God” away from our Lord and doing things our way instead of His, He waits for you with patient love. In your sins, your short-comings, your putting God second, your scheming and

cunning work against your neighbor, your hurtful words and actions - we deserve God's judgment now – for we are under the law of God. But instead, how does He treat us sinners? He treats us with loving patience that waits on us.

In the groaning pain and suffering of this day and age we see our sinful world – the sins we ourselves commit – come to pass – and the outcome is not pretty. But here is where we, in our weaknesses, rely on what God has promised. It says in verse 23... “*We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*” What does that mean? It means that there is more to come. It means that the Holy Spirit and His work guarantee future blessings. In our suffering God is guaranteeing future blessings, future promises and future redemption. We wait eagerly for the adoption as sons.

Well this begs the question: Are you not a son or a daughter of our Lord now? The answer is yes. But we still have to wait... until the fullness of time comes... everything has been made complete in what Jesus did for you. But not everything is complete as far as you are concerned. We will be “transformed,” as it says in Philippians chapter three, into His glorious body on the last day. We who sojourn in this vale of tears we call life must wait. But what do we do while we wait?

There is much to do for the sake of the Kingdom. So, while we wait, we dare not sit idle. You know that friend of yours who is suffering as well? Wouldn't it be fantastic to share with that friend how the sufferings of this present age – the groaning in the pains of childbirth – are but temporary and will see its end? Wouldn't it be fantastic to share with them how they are included by grace through faith into the adoption of sons? Wouldn't it be great to see them here in this place receiving the sustenance of life today and the life to come – God meeting them where they are at with the message of hope and salvation? Wouldn't it be great if your unchurched family and friends were here to gaze upon the cross of Jesus Christ and they were able to see with their mind's eye the bleeding and the dying that does not cause us distress but great joy because it means life for you and me? It would be great. Could you invite them to this place? Could you tell them that Jesus knows suffering beyond all suffering? Could you tell them about your Savior? The answer is, yes.

Beloved, you are an equipped disciple of Christ. If you have the Gospel of Jesus, you have what you need for discipleship. Jesus says in the first verse of the Gospel text appointed for today, “*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*” The demonstration of mercy may be to help our neighbor in need. It might also be to speak the truth in love – when our neighbor needs to hear the law, or when he needs to hear the Gospel.

All around us is destruction. All around us is heartache and pain – much like the burning apartment building illustration indicates. We wait patiently in this vale of tears we call life for a rescuer, a deliverer, a Savior. When will He come? At just the right time – His time. We are adopted sons and daughters and He comes to us to make us His own. How foolish it would be to dash into the flames to seek out a way to safety. That would mean certain death. But God shows us our rescuer in His only begotten Son. He comes to us – thank God – and shows us the way, the truth and the life. No wonder Jesus said, “*No one comes to the Father except through me.*” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.