

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost; July 2, 2023  
Romans 8:18-25  
Our Most Glorious Freedom Is on Its Way

**For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. In fact, creation is waiting with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed. For creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in the hope that creation itself will be set free from the slavery to corruption, in order to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.**

**For we know that all of creation is groaning with birth pains right up to the present time. And not only creation, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. Indeed, it was for this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for something we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patient endurance.**

As we approach the Fourth of July, you have probably already planned how you are going to celebrate. And if you celebrate your freedom on Independence Day the way a lot of Americans do – by blowing a small part of your country with up fireworks – then there will be ringing in your ears. Even if there's no ringing in your ears, thoughts of freedom and all the blessings that come along with hopefully will be ringing in your mind. Freedom is one of the most powerful and inspiring ideas known to mankind. Almost everyone wants freedom. Most who do not have it strive for it. Some have been – and some still are – willing to die for it. Those of us who have not perished in the name of freedom are living in freedom because others have died for it. Freedom is precious – and costly.

Perhaps as thoughts of freedom are at the front of our minds, we can spend some time considering another kind of freedom. As precious as political and societal freedoms are, this kind of freedom is even more precious -- and costly. Today the Holy Spirit, through the pen of St. Paul, points us ahead to our most glorious freedom, and reminds us: Our Most Glorious Freedom is on its Way.

I remember a syndicated newspaper column called "EarthWatch." It was basically a map of the world with little symbols representing all of the natural disasters that had occurred on this planet over the last week including ongoing droughts, earthquakes, flooding, hurricanes, landslides, tsunamis, cyclones, volcanic eruptions, wildfires and more. Sometimes next to the map there was an explanation of how some of these disasters develop. For example, earthquakes happen when tectonic plates shift and rub against each other causing strain until the rock breaks and sends out a shake that reaches us on the earth's surface. It was amazing to read the admission that no one totally understands how hurricanes form, and tornadoes are even more of a mystery.

That was all interesting information and useful enough to know. But none of the explanations of *how* the earth produces things like hurricanes and earthquakes can begin to answer the question *why*. Why should we have to live in world with tragic destruction and the suffering that comes along with it? Why is that my walks home have to include not only beautiful plants and trees, but also dead ones? Not only pretty chirping birds, but roadkill, too? Why all this death and destruction in the world? To that question, St. Paul gives the answer: **For we know that all of creation is groaning with birth pains right up to the present time.** When Adam and Eve fell under sin's curse, God put his whole creation under sin's curse. The disasters that plague this planet are evidence that sin has a hold on all creation. Yes, God still maintains his creation for us to enjoy. Yes, creation is still a mind-boggling gift from him. But it's not perfect. It's far from it. All creation – even rocks and rivers and sticks and sand – are groaning under the painful weight of sin, lashing out as creation waits for relief on the Last Day. The pain and suffering of sin is real for all creation.

And that includes us, God's most special creation. We know firsthand what the rest of God's creation knows. Living under this curse of sin means frustration and groaning for us Christians, too. St. Paul puts it this way: **And not only the creation, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.** There is a lot about moaning and groaning in these verses. Doesn't it get tiring to listen to moaning and groaning? I served two large congregations with large numbers of homebound people. May I ask you a favor? When you get old and can no longer physically come to church, and your pastor comes to pray with you and commune you, please don't moan and groan. Be one of those nice, cheerful, old folks that he looks forward to come and visit!

So much moaning and groaning. But as years passed, I came to understand it more and more. These people had been through a lot in this world. A lot of good times, but a lot of illnesses and funerals and struggles. After a while, I got better at listening to their moaning and groaning.

Life in this world is awfully rough an awful lot of the time, so even if we don't moan and groan with our words, we all do it on the inside. In those moments when sin's painful price weighs heavy on us – when we sit next to a loved one suffering in the hospital – when we feel pain shoot through the limbs of our faltering bodies – when we turn on the news at night and see nothing but stories of suffering and pain – in those moments we groan with all creation. We may rub our foreheads in frustration. We just want to be free from the pain that sin brings into this world, from the trouble and hardship. Just like all creation, we often groan in our hearts for freedom from it all.

So where do we turn for relief, for freedom from all the hardships that come as a result of our sin? Isn't it very easy to search for freedom from hardships and sufferings in the pleasures and distractions of this world? We seek freedom from the pain and frustration by distracting ourselves with hobbies and sports to take our mind off of it. We spend even

more hours at work, figuring if we keep our nose to grindstone, we won't be able to smell all the garbage in our lives. We stare at investment portfolios and think, "Ah, here's my anesthesia." We should be thankful for the things in this world that make us feel good and give us some relief, whether it's a hobby or a friend or work or investments or moderate intake of alcohol. All are blessings from God that can quiet our groaning to a degree and for a while. And God wants us to enjoy them as he sees fit to give them to us. But the danger comes when we turn to these things and depend on them for lasting relief and freedom from sin's consequences.

And that's because the world, and everything in it, even the things that bring us some relief, are under the same curse of sin that we are. In God's Word St. Paul points us forward to the only source for our glorious freedom from sin and all of sin's consequences: **we groan inwardly while we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.** In Jesus' death on the cross, God has already adopted us as his sons. As God's sons, we have the promise of an eternal inheritance in his heavenly kingdom, an inheritance that God in another place promises will never perish, spoil or fade. In the work of our Savior, we are God's adopted sons, in line for the best inheritance, one that never ends. Jesus has saved us from all the struggles of this world. That salvation is our hope, as Paul writes: **Indeed, it was for this hope we were saved.** This our hope: Because Jesus has saved us from our sins, our most glorious freedom – permanent, complete, absolute – freedom from sin and all the suffering that comes with it – is on its way on the Last Day.

And this freedom is about more than relief from sickness, sorrow, and struggles that plague us in this life. It's also about freedom from the eternal punishment we deserved because of our sins. It's about freedom from the suffering of hell and the agony of being separated from God forever. It's total, glorious freedom that can never be taken away.

It's often said about our national freedom that freedom is not free. Freedom comes with a price; it demands service and sacrifice. In the case of nations on this earth, freedom almost always demands those who are willing to serve and to sacrifice. To win our spiritual freedom, our most glorious freedom, our Savior Jesus gave the greatest service and sacrifice possible to free us from all our sins. Our Savior Jesus won this glorious freedom for us by coming into this sinful world as both God and one of us. He came as one of us to keep God's commands in our place, and to die as the sacrifice for our sins. He came as God so that he would be perfect, and make a sacrifice powerful enough to pay for all sin.

Listen to Jesus proclaim who he is, and speak of his own service and sacrifice! He calls himself The Son of Man – one of us! – and also says "he came," and in many places the Bible tells us what that means, that he came from heaven as God. Then he says he came to serve, and to die for all. This is the cost of our freedom from sin, Satan, and eternal death: God himself comes for us as one of us, lives a holy life in the place of all, and dies for all: **"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as**

**a ransom for many.”** We have Jesus’ service – his perfect life – and we have the sacrifice – his death on the cross – that wins us our glorious freedom from sin forever.

The Bible teaches that we are saved through faith, not through hope. But in these verses, Paul focuses on hope. The two – faith and hope – really go hand-in-hand. Faith is trusting in God, especially his promise of forgiveness in Jesus. Hope is expecting that God will follow through on the promises he has made. As we look ahead to our salvation, to our full, glorious freedom on the Last Day, we have hope. Now the way the word “hope” is thrown around today, it can be a little confusing. You see, a Christian’s hope is not the same as a guy sitting in front of the TV with a PowerBall ticket waiting for the winning numbers to be announced. That guy’s hope is one in fifty-three million. Our hope is absolutely certain, and the Greek word Paul uses for it here makes that clear. Christian hope is something solid, built on a firm foundation, something indestructible. Our hope is as sure as the blood Jesus shed, as sure as his empty tomb, as sure as the promises of our God who does not – who never has and never will – lie. Our hope for salvation, for eternal freedom from sin, is based on our Savior Jesus and his work, so our hope cannot be disappointed. Paul tells us: **For in this hope we are saved.**

“Hope” is also for something unseen with our physical eyes. No one here today has ever seen Jesus with physical eyes or put fingers into Jesus’ hand the way St. Thomas did. No, Jesus and his sacrifice, the basis for our hope, remain unseen by our physical eyes. As Paul points out: **Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?**

And so Paul speaks twice in these verses about waiting for our hope to be fulfilled. First he says we wait “patiently,” then he says we wait “eagerly.” It’s only possible for us Christians to wait patiently and eagerly in the hope of our salvation because God gives us his Word and sacrament to strengthen our faith. This is why Christians come together to worship and study God’s Word in churches. This is why Christians in churches call workers to use Word and sacrament full time. This is why Christians make their Bibles more than decorative pieces on their nightstands and coffee tables. This is why we use that Word, taking advantage of every opportunity to see God’s promises there: so that our faith will grow, and patient and eager hope along with it.

With the sure hope in our coming salvation, knowing that our complete freedom from sin is on its way, we can proclaim with Paul: **For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.** We, with Paul, now look ahead to our most glorious freedom, knowing it’s on its way. Because God has promised it. Because Jesus has served and sacrificed for it. Now, even when sin and its curse make us groan with creation, we stay close to God’s promises and hope for the freedom of our salvation. Amen.