

**First Sunday in Advent**  
**December 1, 2013**  
*The Yearning*  
**Romans 8:18-25**

**Introduction**

This preaching gig is dangerous business. You have to live what you say; and if you don't, God will direct circumstances in your life so that you are confronted with your own hypocrisy. It's quite humbling. Last week I tackled the text: "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In every circumstance, give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." Of course, plenty of things went wrong for this pseudo-perfectionist and I had to apply my own sermon to my own life. It's one of the hazards – but actually a wonderful blessing – of the preacher's calling.

This week did not begin well for me. Reminded me of the classic Mama's and the Papa's song from the 60's:

Monday Monday, can't trust that day...

Every other day, every other day,  
 Every other day of the week is fine, yeah  
 But whenever Monday comes, but whenever Monday comes  
 You can find me cryin' all of the time.

I wasn't jilted by a girlfriend, but I was angry. Without telling you the details, I seethed throughout the day over longstanding philosophical issues where I have personally felt the sting of injustice. I almost took that seething anger to bed with me that night, but with Diane's help, was able to come to terms with it.

This world is broken. The injustice that sent me into a tizzy on Monday is nothing compared what goes on in the rest of the world. Typhoons, tsunamis and earthquakes kill thousands of innocent people every year. Defenseless men, women, and children are murdered every year so that powerful people can satisfy their lust for even more power. According to World Vision last year, "more than 115 million children worldwide [were] subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including trafficking for commercial sex exploitation and hazardous physical labor..."<sup>1</sup> Think that's far away? Think again. Human trafficking and sexual exploitation happens even here in our state of South Dakota.

Every person in this room has felt the brokenness of this world. Whether it was injustice, illness, accidents or flat-out evil that you have known, we have all experienced heartache. It shouldn't

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.worldvision.org/our-impact/child-protection?campaign=11935146&gclid=CKnWnr6ohbsCFSQSMwod\\_m0A2g](http://www.worldvision.org/our-impact/child-protection?campaign=11935146&gclid=CKnWnr6ohbsCFSQSMwod_m0A2g) <November 27, 2013>

be that way and we know it. The child's cry of "that's not fair" lies deep within all of us. That is, until the jaded cynicism of the parent's reply of "life's not supposed to be fair" suppresses the hunger for righteousness and justice that God put into every soul. Deep within us, we all know the world is not as it should be. From the beginning of time until this present day, every person who has walked on this earth *yearns* for this world to be made right. The Apostle Paul redirects our universal longing from despair to hope.



### **The Word – Romans 8:18-25**

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

### **Romans 8 Context**

If all of the Apostle Paul's letters in the New Testament were considered as the mountain ranges of the world, then the Book of Romans would be the mighty Himalayas. And if the epistle to the Romans is the Himalayas, then the context of chapter eight is majestic Everest. After spilling a lot of ink about the depth and bondage of sin in the opening chapters, Paul comes to the glorious conclusion that "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" in the first verse of the chapter. We are co-heirs with Christ and his Spirit dwells within us "bearing witness with our spirit" that we are the children of God, destined for glory if we endure suffering as Jesus did. With this eternal destiny sharply in focus, the Apostle writes the opening lines of our text...

***For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (vs. 18)*** I actually like the KJV of this text. (It confirms my suspicions that Paul may have been somewhat of a cowboy and probably liked Country-Western music.) *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* Actually, "reckon" is a better word than "consider." It carries the idea of rational calculation – almost as if it was an accounting device. Greek scholar,

Kenneth Wuest translates it, “I have come to a reasoned conclusion.” Paul has contemplated the magnitude of suffering that he has endured (a lot more than any of us!) and has determined by faith and hope that they are nothing compared to the glory that will one day be revealed in him. Indeed, to the church in Corinth he wrote,

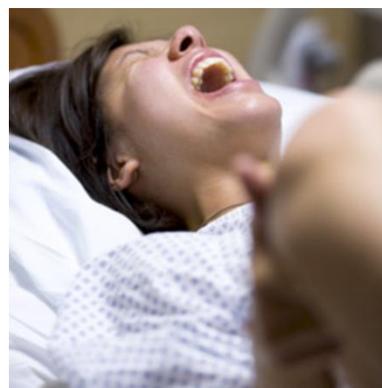
No eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
Nor the heart of man imagined,  
What God has prepared for those who love him.

I Corinthians 2:9

Out of this consideration of his eternal destiny, the Apostle Paul looks outward to the whole cosmos...

***For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. (Vss. 19-22)***

The “revealing of the sons of God” will be at the culmination of this age and inaugurate the New Heaven and the New Earth spoken of in the closing chapters of the Book of Revelation. The picture of the anguish of childbirth is powerful. I was privileged to witness the birth of both of my children and my first grandchild. It’s in that setting that the Orthodox Jewish prayer took on particular significance for me, “Blessed are You, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who has not created me a woman.” The intense pain and the work that a woman experiences in childbirth are impossible for a man to comprehend. And pity the fool who crosses a woman in “transition.”



The storms, the earthquakes, disease and destruction are the pains of the entire cosmos striving to rid itself of the ancient curse and bring forth the birth of a promised tomorrow. The Scripture says that creation was unwillingly subjected to futility. How is that?

Many of you know who Tony Dungy is. He was the coach of the Indianapolis Colts when they won the Super Bowl a few years ago. He is also a committed Christian who is respected universally by everyone. He has three sons. Tragically, the oldest one took his own life just before Christmas in 2006. His middle son is competitive like his father, almost to obsession. His youngest son, Jordan, has a rare congenital disease that does not allow him to feel pain. On

the surface that might seem like a great thing. Not really. Not when you don't feel the pain of a serious burn when you take a cookie off the baking sheet in the oven. Not when you break a bone and don't stop your activity, leading to even more complications. Pain is a blessing. It tells us that something is wrong.

God didn't bring sin and rebellion into this world. Adam and Eve did and we have dutifully followed their lead. And sin brought its consequence of death into this world. Sin has broken everything. You can read the story in Genesis 3. God cursed the ground so that we would feel the pain and know that the world is broken. It is the lesson that Tony Dungy learned through his son when he said, "Sometimes, pain is the only way that will turn us...back to the Father." The pain of this world is a signpost pointing us back to God.

The Apostle continues his thought...

***And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Vs. 23)***

Anyone who is a follower of Jesus Christ - who has been born-again - knows this deep yearning. And the longer we walk with God, the deeper that yearning grows. The more earnestly we press in to know God, the more eternity draws us and the world's grip on us weakens. We yearn because, as Paul says, we "have the firstfruits of the Spirit." The Spirit who resides within us was given to us as "the guarantee [*deposit* (NIV) – the idea of a *down payment*] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Ephesians 1:14). Because of the Spirit's presence in our lives, we know that we are destined for glory. C.S. Lewis put it this way, "'If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.'" (*Mere Christianity*) We have an eternal destiny beyond this mortal life. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul explained, "...our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." (Phil. 3:20-21)

### **The Nature of Hope**

Our text says, "...in this hope we were saved." Friends, this is God's plan for the ages – that everything would be reconciled to him through Christ. We do not yet see with our eyes. We do not touch it with our hands nor hear it with our ears. From time to time, we get a small glimpse of the glory that we will share and his Spirit within us bears witness with ours that a day is coming when all will be put right. This is the Blessed Hope that all Christians share. This is the yearning that passionately burns within our hearts.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:11-13

### **Invitation**

The Thanksgiving holiday is over. I had a good one. I hope you did, too. We are now diving headlong into the Christmas season. If they are not already, the decorations will soon be up. I even have some lights on at my home. But even in the warmth of this sentimental December season, we all know that things are not as they should be. Certainly, the world has plenty of problems, as does our beloved country. A lot of families have problems that particularly manifest themselves during this time of the year and I am certain that there are many in this room that carry deep personal pain—even as I speak. The world is not as it should be. We all know that. We yearn for the day when everything will be made right. That’s what this first Sunday in Advent is all about. Its overriding theme is *hope* because the Savior who once visited this earth will one day come again. And righteousness and justice and wholeness will fill the entire cosmos in the overwhelming flood of God’s promise.

Stoke those fires of yearning. Live in the light of the future, knowing that when Christ returns this world will be put right. With the Spirit living within us, we are a vanguard of that Day. We are co-heirs with Christ in his Kingdom which is now and but not yet. “Since [eternity] has already begun in the Now, hope reshapes the present.”<sup>2</sup> We are his ambassadors of the Kingdom. Should we not represent him in all that we do, proclaiming to the world that Jesus is indeed the Lord of All who is coming soon to set things right?

There is a yearning: a yearning deep within our soul to be with God without the limitation of sin and our mortal bodies. There is a yearning: to know him fully as Emmanuel, “God with us.”

**Video Clip – *The Yearning* - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPW3cVJ12Yw>**

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<sup>2</sup> Scott McKnight. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2013/08/12/the-good-bad-and-ugly-about-christian-eschatology/> <November 27, 2013>