

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

July 26, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

Romans 8:18-25 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. **19** For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. **20** For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. **23** Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? **25** But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

“Alive with Christian Hope”

Which is the first Star Wars movie? Depends on whom you ask. When I was a kid, too young to be allowed to watch such scary movies, the very first Star Wars episode came out. It was simply known as Star Wars. It was groundbreaking in so many ways. But it was familiar in telling an epic tale of battles between good and evil, a group of heroic rebels struggling against a huge evil empire. Only later did I learn that this movie, though it was the first to be released in a franchise, was actually Episode IV. And only after having my son, who understands better how Episodes 1 through VI fit together, did it make sense why “A New Hope” fit as a title for the movie. The movie by itself tells enough of a story. But together with all the other episodes, it gives viewers a more complete picture.

God’s people can easily lose sight of the big picture. So God’s people need a new hope. Not because of some fantasy, intergalactic action adventure. But because of the real world in which we live. We have different episodes playing out in our lives all the time. We are dealing with issues right in front of us. All around us. And it gets easy to lose track of the grand scope of Christian hope. And sometimes this real world and its unpleasant realities consume us. Cause us to forget the bigger picture. Rob us of the something better and bigger that is the substance of our faith. And when we can have someone with the simplicity of a twelve-year-old or missionary apostle explain it to us, we can see how everything fits together. That will allow God’s Word to bring results into our present struggles. God’s Word will produce God’s result of hope. This hope is more than just wishful thinking. It is unique to the Christian faith. It is certain. It gives us life and provides vigor and energy and optimism for our current situation.

The Apostle Paul begins this section by recognizing the brokenness of our current situation. He sets the tone this way: **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”** (Romans 8:18) We don’t need too many reminders that this world no longer resembles the Garden of Eden. Any time you turn on the news you can see the fall, sinful condition of humanity. But even when you

disconnect from TV or the internet, you look around and you see evidence of a world filled with fires and floods, infestations and infections. Try to have a conversation that doesn't involve frustrated huffs about the inconveniences caused by a pandemic, extreme pain and suffering you didn't expect would have to deal with so much. The Apostle explains why this is: **"For the creation was subjected to frustration."** (Romans 8:20) In other words, we are in this together. God's creatures and the rest of God's creation. We all experience something that wasn't part of God's original plan. The corrupting effects of sin were unleashed all throughout our universe, invading and infecting people and planet alike.

This much shouldn't be too controversial. This place isn't perfect. None of the people inhabiting this world are perfect. I think we can all agree on that. But how to do we deal with this reality? That's the key question. Paul just encourages us to make an honest comparison: **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."** (Romans 8:18) And when we factor the current reality and weigh out the infinite blessings God has in store for us, that transaction brings us hope. In the grand scope of Christian hope, we are alive with Christian hope.

Of course, there are alternatives. In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis quipped: "Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in'; aim at earth and you will get neither." (p. 134) But that doesn't stop us from getting wrapped up in the current episode of our lives. We see our disappointments and struggles as missing some key ingredient. We play the "if only" game. If only I had a newer, more reliable vehicle. Then I wouldn't have to rely on someone else for a ride or always be fixing my worthless piece of junk. If only I had a job that would be satisfying. If only I had a job that could pay the bills. If only I could send the kids back to school. If only I didn't have to send my kids into that dangerous environment. If only husband pitched in a little more. If only my wife paid more attention to me. If only I had someone to share my joys and my burdens with.

Those can be key ingredients for having a better, less stressful life. They can all contribute to our overall happiness and satisfaction with our current status. But they aren't properly speaking valid objects for our hope. Even if you get them, you will still end up bored or dissatisfied. You will want someone or something more. You will still keep chasing. They can't give you the life that can come exclusively from Christian hope.

Sometimes we overcorrect so much that we steer into the opposite ditch. We know from experience that the things won't fill our lives. So we learn to lower our expectations. Growing up and outgrowing childish hopes means learning self-control. Don't allow yourself to even want those better things from life. They will only let you down. You can watch everyone foolishly chasing, wasting so much energy trying to fill holes in their lives. And you've just learned to live with the reality of disappointment. What some people call jaded or cynical or pessimistic, you just call realism. Pain is present in this life. Suffering is a reality. Learning to live with it just insulates you from more serious pain and suffering.

And that attitude might be realistic. That's the cavalier Han Solo attitude in the first Star Wars movie. After collecting his reward for rescuing Princess Leia, he just goes about his business. He has to pay his debts to Jabba the Hut. He can't be distracted by silly skirmishes

against galactic superpowers. So often people live as if there no bigger picture for our lives. We know this world with all its things isn't the basis for our ultimate hope. And so we just put our heads down and go about our business. We lose track of the grand scope of Christian hope. At least, our lives are devoid of any actions that identify us as belonging on the side of God's campaign for ultimate hope.

This section of Romans chapter eight helps us keep that Christian hope in view to power us throughout our lives. To keep us from falling into either ditch of putting hope in things of this world or giving up hope all together. That's why Paul writes: **"For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed."** (Romans 8:19) There is something more. Something better is coming. We are in this together with the sum total of everything created. But we know there is something else: **"in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God."** (Romans 8:20,21)

God cursed the ground because of Adam's fatal false choice. But he didn't abandon his creation. Ultimate hope is found in the One who took on human flesh. God's own Son came into this fallen world to bring hope. Jesus became one with God's people to rescue God's most cherished creatures. Jesus endured the worst of this world's pain and suffering to bring restoration to all of creation. Jesus entered into this world to spare us from pessimism toward this world and even the best things it has to offer. Jesus came as our ultimate hope for humanity to lift our eyes higher than our earthbound hopes and expectations.

I'd like to teach you a fancy word that philosophers and theologians bat around, but most regular people don't really care about. Theodicy. Theodicy refers to the question of whether a loving and all-powerful God could allow pain and suffering in this world. If God permits evil things in our lives, doesn't that prove that either he doesn't love us enough or that he isn't powerful enough to stop those evil things? Evil, according to the philosopher, proves that God can't be both loving and all-powerful.

This isn't a time for a deep dive into philosophy. But these verse from Romans chapter eight help us grapple with this deep issue. Paul helps us see that the question isn't really about whether this life is hard or if we will have troubles on this earth. If you are paying attention, you know it is real. Paul helps us to reframe the question. It's not is God real, but how do you want to deal with our earthly reality? Do you want to face real life with God or without? Do you want to struggle on your own? Or do you want to be tied to the one who created and redeemed this world? With hope or without?

A God who cared enough about His creation to send His own Son into this mess, cares intimately about what you are going through. Paul explains: **"Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies."** (Romans 8:23) Jesus entered this world and experienced the worst pain and sadistic suffering to spare you from an eternity of torment. His cross is his commitment to give you something more, something bigger and better: **"For in this hope we were saved."** (Romans 8:24) And it's not some vague, cloudy hope. The death of Jesus bought and purchased your life so you are a child of

God. You don't know what will come around the corner tomorrow, but you know where you will end up when this life is over.

And so all the good things in life, your vehicle and your job, your family and your spouse, are all just gifts pointing you to the perfect gifts God has in store for you. And the pain and suffering you experience aren't just something to shrug off. They are God's practice sessions, training you to strain ahead toward the goal when every weight of pain and suffering will be taken off your shoulders; when every groan and grumble will be transformed into shouts of joy and praise; when every misfortune and affliction will give way to infinite bliss and blessing; when every tear will be dried to give way to heavenly perfection. And so we live with hope by enduring, persevering, and living: **"But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."** (Romans 8:25)

I don't think this is a spoiler alert. Pretty much everyone who wanted to see Episode IV of the Star Wars franchise has had the opportunity to do so some time between 1977 and today. So when we see Luke Skywalker blast into action against the Galactic Empire and fly his X-wing toward the Death Star, we already know how that heroic action ends. But at the time it seemed dangerously optimistic, bordering on a kamikaze mission.

Christians don't have the force. But we do have hope. Our hope is based on the fact of our salvation accomplished by Jesus on the cross. Our hope is directed toward a future when we will enjoy resurrected bodies, a perfectly restored creation free from sin and death and sorrow and trouble. And today we live with the present glory of the Holy Spirit living inside of us. Giving us strength. Offering encouragement. Pointing us back to the rescue carried out by our Savior. Pointing us ahead to the final fulfillment of our hope. And drawing us deeper into God's Word to deepen and solidify our hope. Directing us to God's promises that give our patient waiting the energetic resistance we need to fight through our present struggles as we are drawn closer and more intimately to our Father. Who knows what the next episode will bring. But we know this one is alive with Christian hope. Amen.