

Untitled

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 July 2020

Preacher: Marc Steele

[0:00] Father, I ask you to be with me today as we proclaim your word faithfully.

! We ask that it would be a word of encouragement, that the Holy Spirit would minister amongst our midst today, and that your word would be proclaimed clearly. Amen.

You may be seated. So this is an interesting sermon.

Uh-oh. In this last word. Yeah. No, nothing new and novel, but it's the sermon that eventually happens in the life of every minister within the life of the parish.

There's a little bit of an elephant in the room as we enter today's service, and that is, this is not necessarily but likely the last sermon I'll ever preach from this pulpit.

[1:18] Um, and it's sad, and I initially thought, well, maybe I'll just hide in the lectionary reading and kind of, um, get away from, from all the emotion that's tied up into that.

And then, uh, last week as I was preparing, I looked at the lectionary reading and realized that there was not a chance that that was going to happen. Um, the Holy Spirit has a way of working through lectionary readings like that.

Corleen and I have a very real grief about leaving you. Um, and there's a real sadness there.

As we come to Romans 8, though, we see a major, um, response to this grief. At least this is what I found in this reading as I studied and prepared for this sermon.

And I hope you find comfort here as well. If you take your Bibles and turn with me to Romans chapter 8. Now, I've warned, uh, Caleb, I intend to preach through basically the entirety of Romans chapter 8 today.

[2:33] I've seen some sermon series take two months to go through this passage. I don't know if this is intending to maybe delay our departure, to hang on to it with white knuckles.

Or maybe I'm hoping that at the end of this, you'll be a little more okay with me leaving. Romans chapter 8 is, is, I fear the church has done a little bit of disservice to this because it has turned this chapter into a theological playground where people battle over different positions on the sovereignty of God.

Um, we're going to set that exposition and that discussion to the side today because the reality is, Paul wrote this to a congregation dealing with very real and practical issues in the face of suffering. And there is nothing that as a church body, as a parish, grieves us more than the departures of the ones that we love from in our midst.

That's the real inevitability, right? We're all leaving here at some point. You all have a final Sunday here at Holy Trinity.

[4:01] Um, the Steels know that it's today, but it could just have easily been two weeks ago. We could have been hit by a car on the way pulling out into the parking lot.

Um, we just have an announced departure. I have written down here, and I'm not going to read them for the sake of not wanting to be play with emotions, but I have written here in my notes the names of those who departed here during our time of ministry.

The names of those who died, and the names of those who God has called to serve in other communities.

But grief cannot give way to despair. I will posit that the departure of the ones we love from within our midst, from within our parishes, is a process ordained by God that teaches us more about our journey to fullest joy.

A heavenly joy that is only found as we enter together into the presence of Christ on that final day. So the question Paul has as we begin our reading at chapter 9 is how do we handle the disappointment of life's sorrows and sufferings in light of our position in Christ?

[5:39] In other words, who are we as people of the new covenant written in the blood of Jesus? Paul writes, You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.

If, in fact, the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But, if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is life because of righteousness.

If the Holy Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

We are marked with the Spirit of Christ. It's an indelible mark. It's the kind of marker that somehow when my children mark up the walls in our house seem to find.

It's something that is not coming out. It's a brand. It can't be changed. And it marks you for a destiny, a final destination.

[6:58] Those who are in Christ have their destiny secured. So Paul continues, Brothers, we are debtors. We owe. Not to the flesh.

Not to that one destiny, the destiny of death. Not to the flesh to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die.

But in contrast, that second path, if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led down this path, down this road, by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Paul writes in Ephesians, he talks about the path of life. Those who walk on the path of life. Back in Romans, Paul reminds them, For you do not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.

In other words, this is not our response in the face of suffering in this life. But you have received the spirit of adoptions as sons.

[8:09] We no longer approach God the Father as a wrathful judge, but as a loving father. And through that, the Spirit gives us the ability to cry, Abba, Father.

It is the Holy Spirit himself who bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children, then heirs. Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

Provided we suffer with him in order that we might also be glorified with him. In other words, at the end of this process, this life as Christians, we face that moment where with Christ, in the day of Christ, we will be glorified with him.

Looking forward to that future glorification. To that end, we look at the sufferings of this life today, the disappointments we face.

I mean, no ministry that's ever been run by anybody has ever turned out exactly the way they planned. I see Bishop Dave is agreeing hardly to me.

[9:30] Even on our best days, there's been disappointments. We'd all like the Billy Graham moment, right, where we give the altar call and 20,000 people come and accept Christ.

I've not known that to happen to anybody but Billy Graham. So, so how do we handle these disappointments? We recognize that on this road of life, we have a pastor that pastors the Holy Spirit.

It is he who keeps the ball rolling. It pushes us into areas that we never would have gone to. Makes us face trials we never would have expected.

We are compelled. We have that desire as we saw in verse 14 to fall back in fear, right?

For some reason in the flesh we think we find a place and comfort in the area of disengagement.

We walk on the path of ministry. Things don't work out the way we want them to.

[10:37] It would just be easier to walk away. The NFL season is coming soon. I can spend my Sundays at home and we'll let that parish continue on in the direction they're going.

I have the co-worker who has rejected my witness of Christ and started persecuting me within the workplace. It would be easier for me not to say a word to him ever again.

My children has acted, my child has acted disobediently, has walked away from the faith. It would be easier for me just to withhold my witness and just for the sake of family peace.

We have all these trials we face that we'd rather just disengage from but it is the Holy Spirit that keeps the ball moving and compels us. I have a, and it's not unique to me, a theory, a theological theory, I'll test it out here.

It's probably not best usually to test things out from the pulpit. But I call it the eschatological theory of gravity. And it's this, it is that, it's not that we are being driven towards that final day, but we are being pulled towards it.

[11:59] We're being pulled towards the day of Christ. In fact, that day of Christ actually orders everything that has happened to you this morning.

It pulls you towards, and it's the spirit that pulls us towards that day. And we don't fully understand how that plays out. We understand the broad strokes.

We proclaim the great victory of the day to come. We especially look forward to that during the Advent season and when we proclaim the creed. But we don't understand the final details.

But the Apostle John reminds us in 1 John chapter 3, see what kind of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called children of God.

And so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Beloved, we are God's children now.

[13:02] and what we will yet be has not appeared, but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.

And everyone who hopes in this way in Him purifies himself as Jesus is pure. Amen. hope.

Paul writes, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is yet to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

That makes sense. We understand it's a sin cursed world. It should be more aware to us in 2020 than it has at any other point in your life. Something's broken in the world around us.

Sin broke it. It needs to be fixed. It shouldn't surprise us that creation is waiting. 1 Paul writes in Romans 8.20, the creation was subjected to futility not willingly.

[14:18] It wasn't nature's fault. It wasn't creation's fault, 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 this day. And now here's the surprising part to me. Not only is creation, but we ourselves.

Why do we groan? We know the broad strokes of the end of the story. We who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons.

The redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. hope that is seen is not hope.

That's clear. If you're hoping for something and I show you what it is and I tell you yeah it's kind of what you're going to get for Christmas, you know what your Christmas gift is. There's no hope there, there's no anticipation.

[15:31] But we anticipate. And as we anticipate, we suffer. hope for it and that suffering is real. You can't reason your way out of that.

But we have that anticipation of the greater glory yet to see. And then Paul writes, and I think that if there's one verse to focus on today, but if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

When held up to the light of eternity, this life is a sprint, not a marathon. You usually have that told to you in reverse.

But this life is a sprint, not a marathon. The suffering of this present age is particularly poignant for the believer because they experience the pain of this life with the expectation of the world to come. And we hope with patience, but that patience is not a self-generated gift. You don't bring patience to the table. It is a fruit of the Spirit.

[16:55] We see that written in Galatians chapter 5. Again, this is the pastoral care of the Holy Spirit as we walk through this life. You might wonder, what are Paul's disappointments?

They were many. In this very book we have at the closing, he says, this is the reason why I have been so often hindered from coming to you.

And that reason was that there was a people in another country that the Holy Spirit was compelling him and pushing him towards. He wanted to go to one area of the Holy Spirit pushed him to another area.

Paul had disappointments in his ministry. He had the thorn in the flesh. He had beatings.

He was, it's just a disappointment after disappointment, but he ended up having one of the most fruitful ministry to the Gentiles. Matter of fact, I would say the most fruitful ministry to the Gentiles has ever been seen in the church age.

[18:05] He recognized though that the Spirit's direction was pulling him into the future age. And that he had a limited amount of time to sprint towards that finish line.

Sisters and brothers, we are rushing headlong into the future age. To dwell together eternally in full fellowship in the physical presence of our beloved Savior.

And that's why I have a bit of cognitive dissonance here today as I'm preaching this, as we prepare to move, as we went through the ordination process.

I desire two things at once. One, to serve as rector of St. George's Anglican Church in Helmetta.

But on the other hand, I want to remain here and serve as your assistant pastor.

But I can't do both because I'm not God. And I can't serve in two places at the same time. As Paul was, I too am hindered from remaining.

[19 : 16] I've been called and compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to a new place. A place that has people who need the saving name of Jesus proclaimed to them. The steels are being moved by a work of the Holy Spirit.

You must remember it is he that keeps the ball of salvation history moving. I've shared with you today some of the mental struggles I've had over the last months in accepting this new call in my life.

And you might say, well, the answer's easy. Nobody asked you to leave, right? None of you came to leave. Just stay. But brothers and sisters, we have a great and exceedingly excellent hope.

And that cognitive dissonance actually points to what my true desire is. The desire is that one day we and the people of St. George's and people yet to come to Christ, people yet to be born, those who have died, those who have had to move to other areas of the country, even other areas of the world we've sent people.

That desire that we all want to be together is good because it points to that final day and that final age. There's a day coming when we will be reunited, when we will gather every tribe and every nation, and a day when we get the best of both worlds that we cannot have in this life.

[21 : 01] And while we groan inwardly waiting for the redemption of our bodies, we must remember it is the Holy Spirit who brings life, not to just us as individual believers, believers, but to us as a larger body.

Theologians will say that the work of the Spirit is vivifying, that is it makes alive. It is not news to him when we experience loss.

And that's not fatalism. Paul isn't teaching an attitude that says, oh boy, suck it up. This is not the pastoral care given to you by those who have served in the armed forces by your drill instructor.

It's not that kind of pastoral care. It doesn't say consider yourself lucky that at least we're still standing at the end of the day after we've counted our losses.

The Holy Spirit is a loving pastor. And he recognizes our pain and confusion and in the day of our sorrows draws us near to the source of our joy.

[22 : 24] Paul writes, likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us.

With groanings too deep for words, and he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

And I pause here in the reading to say, I'm always scared to read the next verse, because I consider this to be, and hear me out, it's almost like a Christian curse word.

We spit this out every time we face a trial in our life. It's the quick thing you spit out every time. The boss lights into you, the car tire goes flat, and you quickly say, all things work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose.

And I think the way we handle this text doesn't give it the fullness that it deserves. Because Paul here is not saying, try to reason your way through this trial.

[23 : 36] He just said it's an unreasonable process. You can't work your way through this, right? We don't know how to pray as we ought. What does that mean?

We are overwhelmed by the sorrows that face us. So what do we do in that? We take it to that great path of the Holy Spirit, and he intercedes on our behalf.

Saying what? We will make the day of Christ a very real expectation and hope that you will face with the patience that he gives you.

And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to his purpose, for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.

On that last great day, God said, in order that he might be the first born among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified.

[24 : 42] And those whom he justified, he also glorified. Speaking that last great day. Of course, that predestined word has become its own kind of dirty word in American circles these days.

But as good Anglicans, and Father Kel taught me this, he's a good Anglican, we're all good Anglicans, we understand that that idea and truth of predestination is not limited to conversion, it's not limited to the moment you come to faith in Christ, but it looks forward to the final work. It includes that, yes, but it's the whole kit and caboodle. The whole thing is being spoken of. That Holy Spirit, the pastor of our lives, the shepherd of our souls, that compelling force that pushes us out into the world, he guarantees the whole thing.

We're marked indelibly. And if we need proof that the suffering of this age points forward to the day of the Lord and that full reunification, where, by the way, I'll know you perfectly, that's not happened in the last four years, you'll know me perfectly, that hasn't happened in the last four years.

If we need assurance that this looks forward, the Holy Spirit gives it to us here in this passage and reminds us that the Father himself endured the ultimate pain of loss, the sacrifice of the only begotten Son on our behalf for greater glory, the greater glory that points forward to that same day of the Lord in which we find hope.

[26 : 38] Paul writes, what then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Therefore, who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Remember that important step before he glorifies. Christ, who is to condemn?

Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised and who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is himself interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from that love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As is written, Paul acknowledges the suffering of this age. For your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

[27 : 47] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So while we depart today, we are not separated because together we are united in the spirit of Christ and we share the same destiny.

the road we walk on together leads to the same destination. And the same vivifying spirit that empowers my ministry in a new state at a new parish walks with you and in you here today on to the day of the Lord.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.