

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT: Spiritually Grounded

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Romans 8:18-30¹

TLC Keene, NH

Grounded in Hope

"For in this hope we were saved."

Introduction

Hope Denied. Such is how I felt, when, about 2/3 of the way up the White Cross Trail of Mt. Monadnock yesterday, heat and humidity – not to mention maxed out quads and gluts – got the best of me. So, not wanting to become an episode on North Woods Law, I turned to my traveling companion – Elisha – and said, "Though we've made it before, we won't be doing it today!" A little deflated, we made our way back down.

*"I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I **hope**,"* sung the pilgrims as they ascended the hill into Jerusalem for festival. [Psalm 130:5]

***Hope** deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life,"* observed Solomon. [Proverbs 13:12]

Main Thought: Having hope is hard for folks who desire immediate solutions ... who feel the need to solve all of their own problems. Where, the Christian's faith (for the present) and hope (faith for the future) is rooted in God's definite word and promise, borne and nurtured in us by the Holy Spirit's gifts of water and the Word.

Therefore, let the Pentecost people of God, even in their most distressing times, remain grounded in the sure and certain hope of our calling in Christ, and in the strength of the Holy Spirit who intercedes for His own.

Amen.

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To be sure **THERE IS A CAUSE NOT TO HOPE: SUFFERINGS ABOUND**

¹ Other potential "series": Our Future Glory ... No Frustration ... A Welcomed Intercession

Where, when we left off last Sunday, we did so with this life-affirming promise ringing in our ears [Romans 8:16-17]:

"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ ..."

Here, Paul points us to the Holy Spirit, who both brings us into our familial relationship with "Abba, Father," and then, holds fast our standing as the children of God. Though with a caveat ...

"Provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Suffer? Not sure I signed up for that. Where, unfortunately, by nature of this world, and us in it, we have no choice, as suffering – a result of sin's entrance in this world – has infected everything ... beginning with creation:

¹⁹ **For the creation** waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

²⁰ For the creation **was subjected to futility** [meaninglessness, "vanity of vanities"], not willingly, but because of him [Adam ... God] who subjected it, **in hope**

²¹ **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.**

²² **For we know that the whole creation has been groaning** ["a deep sigh because of an unfavorable circumstance"²] **together in the pains of childbirth until now.**

"This Is [Still] My Father's World," amen? Wherein, "God will yet be glorified by all His works. And when God is glorified, His creatures are blessed."
[Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 170]

But "*I feel the earth move under my feet, I see the sky tumbling down, tumbling down.*" Wherein, it's no surprise to anyone that this planet is suffering ... shaken up and out as this world's groans grow greater and gaudier with each Fahrenheit, flood, and fire.

² Groll, *CJ*, April 2002, 213; "Sin has shattered the myth that demons can be vanquished by naming them. Psychosis is deeper than merely saying, 'I have a problem!'"

Where, if that wasn't distressing, we, too, are groaning under the weight of that unholy three – sin, death and hell.

²³ *And not only the creation, but **we ourselves, who have the first fruits** ["first installment ... down payment"³] **of the Spirit** [the believer's security or identification-card⁴], **groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.***

Indeed, life is all a bit overwhelming, at times, amen? Where so often, we feel "overcome by the seeming hopelessness of it all, of the helplessness in the face of the power wielded by that 'other side' – sin, death and Satan – that all we can do is groan. Not the "Oh, no, what next?" shrugging kind of groan, or a groan of utter despair. But rather the groan of deepest yearning for deliverance; longing for God's kingdom to come and for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. [Adapted from Stuenkel, *CPR*, 6:3, 37]⁵

What is it that leads you to "groan"? And what is the remedy?

Well, if there is a cause *not* to hope, **THERE IS all the more A CURE ENABLING US TO HOPE: ABOUNDING ALL THE MORE:**

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Talk about someone would know [see 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 & 11:21a-29].

³ Bruce, 173; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:14

⁴ Bruce, 173-174

⁵ Stuenkel: 1. A. "We may feel angry and frustrated as we experience our own weakness and inability to change our circumstances; B. We may find ourselves frustrated in relationship and in our inability to break the force of evil in our life or another person's life; C. We may find ourselves spiritually numbed by tragedy, chronic illness, or a financial disaster that weighs heavily on our hearts ... E. We struggle at those points, not wanting to admit our weakness and give up. But it is precisely when we recognize our limitations and helplessness – that we are insufficient – that we learn that God's grace in Christ is all-sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)."

Clement of Rome tells us that following Paul's beheading "weeping friends took up his corpse and carried it for burial in those subterranean labyrinths where, through many ages of oppression, the persecuted church found re-fuge for the living and sepulchers for the dead." [*Epistle to the Romans*, 1, 5]

But, by the Holy Spirit, Paul still could boldly affirm:

"We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." [2 Corinthians 4:18]

With hope, "we walk toward that unseen but certain world with the resilient steps of men whose future is so sure and great that the present burden of our secular knapsacks seems no weight at all." [Franzmann, *Romans*, 151]

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

How? First, by interceding in our prayer life ... by making sense of our sighs and groans, and fashioning them into intelligible prayers on our behalf.

For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings ["those longings and aspirations which well up from the spiritual depths and cannot be imprisoned by" or are⁶] ***too deep for words.*** ²⁷ *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.*

Child of God, the strength of our prayers does not come in proportion to how eloquent we are with our words. Rather, what makes the *divine* difference is the spiritual "atmosphere in which we live ... our Paraclete, our Counselor. [Franzmann, 151-152] It is He who fills the void, who brings our longings to the Father's throne, and then, bathes us in the peace of knowing that our prayers are heard, and answered acc. to the Father's will.

Where, if those two promises were not enough (vv. 18, 26), the Holy Spirit has one additional assurance for we who are sore and oppressed:

⁶ Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 175

²⁸ And we know ["from revelation rather than personal experience"⁷] **that for those who love God all things work together** [in divine synergy] **for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**⁸

No, all of the things that happen to us are good. But, whatever or "whoever may have been the vehicle of His call ... it [is] *God's* call ... which reached us and made us lovers of Him. No accident of history made us His ... He was in charge, and He is [still] in charge; all the 'accidents' of history are His working for our good." [Franzmann, 153]

How do we "know" this? Because of *who* is doing *what* for *whom*!

²⁹ For those whom He foreknew He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brothers.*
³⁰ And those whom He predestined HE also called, and those whom HE called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.

Child of God, long before time, God had our salvation covered – from first to last. Where, we may not fully grasp the meaning of all of the cross-inspired verbs Paul uses to describe such a gift, but two things are clear: 1) these are Gospel Words, and; 2) God is doing them ... that for whatever we may understand, each Word is meant to instill hope, not doubt or fear. Each points to our names being inked into God's gracious plan – in scarlet red.

Therefore, as to the times of distress in our lives, of suffering and pain:

† *Kairos* moments always bring about upheaval ... embrace them. Wait for what the Lord will do, all the while asking yourself in their midst: What does He want you to repent of? What does He want you to believe?

⁷ *Sermon Studies on the Epistles (A)*, 274

⁸ "The intention of verse 28 is not to deny the seriousness of the pain and suffering that people experience; it should not lead to a superficial and glib 'Smile, God loves you.' Nor is it designed to create abject resignation toward the *status quo*. Rather, it comforts Christians with the assurance that nothing, not even the worst tragedy or the most oppressive persecution, can result in their ultimate harm." [Raabe, *CJ*, July 1993, 245]

† Lean all the more into what we “know” – Word & Sacrament – the tried and true gifts of God. As they have breathed life into what may have felt like *“the valley of dry bones,”* these means will never disappoint you.

† Thirdly, find companions to walk with you on the way. The “mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters in Christ” is a gift. Don’t go the way alone, potentially denying another or yourself comfort.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” [2 Corinthians 1:4-5]

† Fourth, pray. Not perfunctorily, on the run, but *“with sighs too deep for words.”* Be. Abide in Him ... even when the Lord brings out the sheers for pruning. Faith will be all the more stronger and fruitful as a result.

Conclusion

“The swallows never fail.” Wherein, every year, around March 19 [St. Joseph’s Day] thousands of orange tailed Cliff Swallows arrive from Argentina to a Spanish mission in San Juan Capistrano, California, as they have done in the over 250 year history of that mission. “Whether it be rain or sunshine, they come and the mission greets them with the peal of its bells.” [*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 3/20/1994, 9A in *CPR*, 6:3, 12] Where, with almost the same precision as when they come, around October 23 [the Day of San Juan], the infamous cliff swallows return to their wintering grounds in Argentina, 6,000 miles south.

Ascents up Monadnock notwithstanding, “already now we are able to see, though faintly, some of the facets of that glory. We are cleansed from sin. We are adopted into God’s family. We are made the heirs of Gods glory. We witness to the risen Christ and demonstrate His love to our neighbors ... We who by sin have come short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23) are now destined with the Father of glory (Ephesians 1:17) to appear with Christ in glory (Colossians 3:4) and shall be given the crown of glory that will not fade (1 Peter 5:4).” [*SSoE (A)*, 276] Such is our life in the Spirit.

Therefore, Pentecost people of God, even in your most distressing times, remain grounded in the sure and certain hope of your calling in Christ, and in the strength of the Holy Spirit who still/will always intercede for His own.

Amen.

Bible Study:

OPEN:

1. As you may have come (no doubt often) to reflect on God's Word – perhaps in conjunction with your own life experiences – what do you understand that Word to say about the nature of suffering?

[1) Suffering – in both creation and in us – is a direct result of sin's entrance into the world; 2) it is not, however, a direct result of our own sin, as though God might be singling us out for punishment (consequences for our actions notwithstanding); 3) whatever the reason for it, God does not will it, though He does allow it – to bring us to repentance (the tower of Siloam), that His own glory would be revealed (the man born blind), for character to blossom into faith (present trust), and hope (future trust), 4) whatever the suffering, for those who love God & are called according to His purposes, all things work together for good, as God's purposes get worked out in our lives.]

Read Romans 8: (1-17 by way of review), 18-30.

DIG:

2. What words and vivid images in these vv. 18-30 underscore the difficulties of this present time?

[Paul knew well what he was talking about. See 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 & 11:21a-29. He, like so many Biblical characters graduated from "the school of hard knocks," *summa cum laude*, here, using some powerful words – "frustration, groaning, bondage, decay, corruption" ... and later, vv. 31-39, "persecution, nakedness, peril, famine, sword ..."]

3. How would you characterize the groanings presently going on in creation? How about in yourself?
4. What are the three reasons for our hope, even in the midst of these groanings (vv. 18ff, 26f and 28ff)?
5. Unpacking the first reason, how does eager expectation help us cope with our present problems and suffering?

[Who is doing the “subjecting”? Certainly, man subjected this world to darkness when sin got the better of him/her, plunging this planet into chaos and despair – something WE are still doing; however, God is more likely doing the subjecting here, as He is also the Author of the resulting redemption that is forthcoming. Adam and Eve cursed themselves with their sin, but God also declared a curse on them, with the view towards the hope of the coming Savior. See Keller, 36]

[All told, Paul says that “if you know where you are heading in the future, you won’t even entertain the idea that your current problems and pain aren’t worth it.” – Keller, 35; READ Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (174-175); finally, borrowing TLC’s tagline, “Redeemed and restored, we will forever be rejoicing in Jesus!”]

6. What specifically does the Holy Spirit do to help us in our groanings?

[He also “groans” with us, making sense of our prayers, interceding on our behalf, and then, carrying those prayers to the throne of the Father and laying them at His feet.]

7. Noting carefully what Paul is – and is not – saying, what specifically comforts us in v. 28? What exactly *is* God’s good purpose for us?

[The comfort from this v. comes in three ways: 1) It lead us to gratitude and joy, even for the “routine” things in life; 2) This truth removes general fear and anxiety when life “goes wrong,” and; 3) It helps us see God’s purpose in difficulties – Keller, 43; “There are no accidents in God’s economy of grace.” – Harkey; “Everything is needful that He sends; nothing can be needful that He withholds.” – John Newton]

8. V. 28 must always be read in light of vv. 29-30, what some call “the golden chain of redemption.” Without getting into the meat of each verb, what is your takeaway from these critical verses? What observations arise?

[1) Who is doing the verbs, namely God; 2) What tense they are in – aorist, that is, completed actions, and; 3) Each of them are Gospel words, “Good News!” How do these observations strike you about the nature of vv. 18-30 as a whole?]

[For those wanting to wade into the weeds a bit, see Keller, 50-52!]

REFLECT:

9. In v. 17 Paul stated that we must share in Christ’s suffering in order to share in His glory. How do vv. 18-30 clarify and confirm this?

10. A Christian friend of yours come to you at midnight, not looking to borrow a loaf of bread for an unexpected guest who happened to show up on their doorstep, but she or he comes to you in deep distress, looking for a Word of spiritual counsel. His life of late has been one of great upheaval, filled with events way beyond his control. She feels a need for change, but is not quite sure what that change would look like. The situation he is in seems locked up tight, with few options, none of which are bringing him any peace, She is questioning where God is in all of this, whether He is in all of this. Your unsettled and anxious friend needs a Word; he/she needs assurance ... hope. What would you say?

[For Pastor Ed's "advice," worship is at 10:30! SYOS!

[Friday E-mail:] So, like in one of our Lord's parables, a Christian friend of yours come to you at midnight ... not looking to borrow a loaf of bread for an unexpected guest who happened to show up on their doorstep, but she or he comes to you in deep distress, looking for a Word of spiritual counsel. His life of late has been one of great upheaval, filled with events way beyond his control. She feels a need for change, but is not quite sure what that change would look like. The situation he is in seems locked up tight, with few options, none of which are bringing him any peace, She is questioning where God is in all of this, *whether* He is in all of this. Your unsettled and anxious friend needs a Word; he/she needs assurance ... hope. What would you say? Where would direct them?

The first thing I would do is point them to Romans chapter 8. Where, two weeks ago, we reaffirmed that *"there is no condemnation"* for those in Christ Jesus. That God is for us, evidenced by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Week 2? We rejoiced that there is also *"no obligation"* to our heavenly Father, outside the "debt of love," that attitude of gratitude rendered to Him for the Spirit's making us children of God. Yes, that's right! Say it. "I am a child of God." Indeed, you are!

Bringing us to week 3 of my sermon series entitled "Life in the Spirit," and Paul's exhortation in chapter **Romans 8:18-30**. Here, Paul grounds us in hope, saying: *"For in this hope we were saved ... [where] if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."* In no way making light of the fact that we have every cause *not* to hope, as sin manifests itself in the groanings going on both without and within, there is a cure – a thrice- holy remedy – that leads our hearts to abound all the more in ... hope ... a "blessed assurance" culminating in the promise that on the basis of God's revelation, *"we know that for those who love God, [and] for those who are called according to His purpose, all things work together for good."* All things work in divine synergy.

How else would I counsel my friend? You didn't think I'd give it all away did you? But, I promise, there's more, enabling us to remain "spiritually grounded." Anyone you know could use a sermon like that? SYOS