

## "Groaning In Labor"

Romans 8:12-25

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[The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor](#)

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)

Romans 8:12-25

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Prayer.

On rare occasion  
The New Revised Standard Version  
Of the Bible  
Fails the reader.  
Today is such an occasion.  
Gender is obscured  
To make the passage more politically  
correct,  
But deeper meaning is lost.  
This is the rub:  
"For all who are led by the Spirit of God  
are children of God,"  
more accurately should read  
"For all who are led by the Spirit of God

are sons of God,"  
... or so I am told by the Greek scholars.  
The difference is profound.  
To ancient Romans,  
Living in the time of the apostle Paul,  
Being a son,  
Even an adopted son,  
was something special.  
In the patriarchal culture of antiquity,  
normally a son or sons  
were the heirs  
of the father's accumulated resources.  
The eldest received a double share;  
Others, less.  
Women were married off  
And thus not the focus of inheritance.

When Paul declares  
"For all who are led by the Spirit of God  
are sons of God,"  
he is talking about being related to God  
as if each of us were the eldest male,  
in such a manner that we have an  
inheritance,  
which is itself an inheritance with Christ.<sup>1</sup>

In other words,  
God makes it personal.  
God makes us family.  
What God does for you and me  
Is all about God moving in,  
working his way  
into every intimate detail of our life.  
Have no fear,  
God is not some cosmic voyeur,  
Searching for some entertainment  
By sticking his eye  
to the knothole of our life.  
Rather,  
God has a vested interest  
For moving in,  
For worming his way into every  
Little facet and detail of our world.

There is a reason  
the Spirit is in every breath,  
God speaks through our every thought,  
And God has surrounded us  
with every imaginable angel.  
God has risked everything  
On our behalf.  
He sent his son,  
Jesus Christ,  
To save each and every one of us.  
God isn't going to see his investment fail.

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<sup>1</sup> Marion L. Soards, Professor of New  
Testament Studies, Louisville Presbyterian  
Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY. As found  
at WorkingPreacher.org

And God isn't going to let any one  
Slip away.  
Not if he can help it.

If you are led by his Spirit,  
You are his Son,  
Regardless of  
your gender, color, or orientation,  
And you are entitled  
To his inheritance.  
It is that simple.  
Acceptance is the easiest wager  
any gambler could make.  
Shoot, this isn't even gambling.  
This is what's known as grace.

In some respects  
The only one doing the gambling is God:  
God is gambling that  
we'll be at the table  
And that we will accept  
The grace that he has to offer.

Like it or not,  
God is always present in our life;  
Watching it unfold like a movie on a  
screen.  
Now there is a deterrent for you!  
Nothing turns off temptation  
quite like becoming aware  
that God is looking over your shoulder.  
The risks that his omniscience poses  
Is that  
we hold no secrets,  
We cannot withhold anything  
From his divine knowledge.  
Even if we had a say in the matter,  
Which we don't,  
But, even if we did,  
The benefits of living in God's grace  
Far outweighs the risk  
Of relating with an all-knowing God.

The apostle Paul  
Reminds us this morning  
That God isn't a rookie,  
And he certainly isn't a lightweight.  
The world is filled with suffering, sin and  
evil.  
What makes any of us think  
That we should have it any better  
Than old Job?

Fact is  
Simply because we are in the world  
Means we will suffer the consequences  
Of aging, dying, and death.  
We will suffer the penalty  
Of all of the evil powers that be,  
Working overtime for two-thousand years  
Just for the sake of  
creating death and dealing destruction,  
Just for the satisfaction of  
causing chaos and slinging sin,  
Whenever and however it can be  
effected.  
He's known from the beginning  
we're imperfect.  
God's aware of our weaknesses.  
And that's why God is  
most aggressively,  
Most assertively,  
active in our lives  
Exactly when  
bad things happen to good people.

Should we think suffering has no  
purpose?  
No! of course not!  
Suffering always has a purpose:  
It is to expose the angels God gives us,  
It is to work the miracles of healing in our  
midst,  
It is always the hope of God  
That through suffering  
We might be drawn closer together.

While we wait  
With all humanity  
Groaning as if in labor ...  
Manifest as war, depravity,  
violence, greed,  
consumption, selfish-disregard  
and every other vise under the sun ...  
... while we wait  
we have hope.  
We have hope  
Because we live in the Spirit.  
The Spirit is in us  
And works through us.  
God watches over us  
And God guides and directs us.  
We have hope that  
In spite of the labor pains  
We now experience in the flesh,  
They will become  
one day  
As nothing more than faded memories.  
The pain will be gone  
And the joy of salvation,  
The glory about to be revealed,  
will become  
Our sole and solitary concern.  
We have hope  
Because the new heaven  
And the new earth  
That God is creating  
Is reordered  
And established according to divine  
principles:  
Reconciliation with those who have been  
estranged,  
Healing that which has been broken,  
And love that finds its source with God  
and quickly flows to bring new life to all  
things.

Paul reminds us this morning  
That we've been adopted by God,

Given his divine inheritance  
As if we were the eldest son,  
And because we live life in the Spirit,  
We are given grace sufficient  
To endure the groaning of this age  
With certain hope  
That the age to come  
Will be sweet.  
May it be so.  
Thanks be to God.  
Amen.