

# Trinity 4, 2016

## Keeping Hope Alive

Romans 8:18-25

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, Or

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There is a common phrase we use in our home that helps keep Lizzy focused on doing what is expected of a good person, that phrase is “good girls get good things.” In her earlier stages she would be so excited to see what her good behavior would bring. But, as time goes on...children must grow up and start asking questions. So, today it is no longer just giddiness in the back seat of the car as we secretly take her out for ice cream. Oh no, now we have entered the “give me a hint” stage and hints become hints on top of hints on top of hints. It was cute when it first started but as time went on the hints she wanted started becoming demands...demands that began to illustrate that she no longer wanted to rest in the hope of what was to come but wanted to know NOW. Okay, so we told her reward, her surprise for being good...that at least ended the thousand questions but, by the time we got to the surprise it was no longer a surprise and her mind was already occupied with other things and the point of being good was lost on having the pre-knowledge of what was ahead. So, keep this story in mind...it will come back in a similar but much more dramatic way as we go through today's sermon.

Let's now turn our attention to Paul's letter to the Romans where we find that words can be tricky. Interpretations of foreign writings can be difficult to extend into other languages, and so, even more difficult for the reader to comprehend the original meaning. Today's reading from the book of Romans is such a text. At first glance we may not understand who the creature is that Paul is talking about or how this creature ties in with our redemption and lives along side us in hope. For some clarification I resort to the New Jerusalem Bible where Paul writes:

*“In my estimation, all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us, for the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed. It was not for its own purposes that creation had frustration*

*imposed on it, but for the purposes of him who imposed it-with the intention that the whole creation itself might be freed from its slavery to corruption and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God. We are well aware that the whole creation, until this time, has been groaning in labour pains. And not only that: we too, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we are groaning inside ourselves, waiting with eagerness for our bodies to be set free. In hope, we already have salvation; in hope, not visibly present, or we should not be hoping -- nobody goes on hoping for something which is already visible. But having this hope for what we cannot yet see, we are able to wait for it with persevering confidence" (Rom. 8:18-25; New Jerusalem Bible).*

The early Christian church was very aware of their modern day sufferings experienced through warfare, poverty and disease and so it is not surprising that the early Christian Fathers paid much attention to the verse I just read. In these verses we see that hope has a place, that hope is necessary, that hope keeps us perusing the things of God. The early church was very much ready to leave this temporal world in exchange for the promises of the next. While the Fathers of the church had differing views on what it all meant, in the end they agreed that the futility of this world was only temporal and would vanish when the fullness of Christ was revealed. As 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians we can still relate to the sufferings of warfare, poverty and disease just as our first Christian brethren...as we too continue in hope persevering in the confidence that lives within us.

It is our confidence in the promises of Christ's sacrifice that allows us to persevere in our hope through faith and it is that very hope that keeps the church alive! Listen again to St. Paul:

*"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. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."*

The creation itself groans within, willing to persist until the end when mankind's redemption will be its release from corruption and its long awaited liberty will shine as a perpetual light in the glorious victory of God Almighty. You see...it is not only **our** hope in Christ, but also the

hope of all creation. Christ, in His incarnation, became part of creation and when He came out of the grave, when Christ overcame and rose from the bondage of mankind's fall...he took creation with Him...all of it. Christ was there in the beginning with God as the Holy Spirit moved on the face of the waters. The creation belongs to the Father, the creation belongs to the son and the creation belongs to the Holy Spirit. When mankind fell there was only one way to redeem all of creation...the answer was to become part of it...and reunite it once again.

It is God incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ that gives us hope, because we can trust that He is faithful to that which belongs to Him...and that is all of creation...whatever Christ did not assume of our natures (and that includes our connections to this planet) cannot be redeemed. But we know, as we hear in the Holy Communion consecration, that Christ made a *“full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the **whole** world”* (1928 BCP, pg. 80). From dust we came...unto dust we shall return. We are intimately part of this earth and it shares in eternity with us. Doesn't scripture tell us that there will be a new heaven and a new earth? think about that...

The earth moans for its creator just as we do. These moaning's come from deep within and cry out for something more, something better than what we have come to accept as part of life this side of heaven...microscopic mutating bugs that deform a human fetus before it ever has a chance, escalating poverty and starvation in a world that either can't keep up or doesn't care, warfare in the name of a false deity that requires innocent blood. We get angry and scream sometimes when it gets to be too much...how much are we to bare before we have to let off some steam and cry out to God “we are tired of this temporal life and are ready for your glorious return to rectify what sin has destroyed. And not only us but the earth itself cries out as it screams across oceans and lands in devastating typhoons and bleeds thorough volcanic pours as the stress reaches the proportions of Christ as He prayed in Gethsemane.

And who can blame us? We cry out “Lord show us the light...open a window that we might see the light of our hope...but...that would not be the way. It is our hope, it is in the very nature of hope that the church is kept alive and that salvation is able to reach the uttermost parts of the

earth. The whole creation is watching and waiting for our redemption and for our bodies to be set free so that it too may obtain that everlasting joy found in that very hope of which we await so patiently.

Hope illuminated before its time is no longer hope but merely an expectation, an expectancy that soon loses its luster and is taken for granted. As brothers and sisters in the faith we want answers...and that's natural...after all we are fallen and we desire desperately be eternally with the Father and resurrected from our corrupted natures. But let us let some things remain in mystery...we do not have to have all the answers to find our satisfaction in Christ. Keep moving forward in the faith knowing that you will be rewarded for lives lived for Christ...I promise...you will get more than ice cream.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.