

Peace Lutheran Church

Great Falls, MT

7 Pentecost A 2020

Sufferings Compared To Glory

Romans 8:18-27

The mention of present sufferings by St. Paul strikes a familiar chord with us in this present time of pandemic. Just what was going on in the church at the time of Paul we don't know. Paul doesn't give us many details to go on. The present sufferings of the Early Church are not listed by name. By way of comparison, we do know is that our present time of gathering as a church is at significant risk of being restricted. Viruses do not discriminate, and present suffering can and does take many forms. A lot of people are scared of catching a bug that puts everyone in personal danger. Others are afraid of passing on what they cannot recognize or show no symptoms of having. Although we may not be suffering in the way many others all over the world are, nevertheless, anxiety is the watchword of the day. What we need most of all in this present age is the ageless message of peace from God's own Word. It is the same message that St. Paul preached to the saints of old living in Rome.

Whatever the apostle and those of his company were going through, the present circumstance did not define the future goal. Present sufferings are a result of sin. As such, we are recipients of that which is ours by nature. If you want to escape sin and suffering in this world, death is the only logical alternative. Not much hope there. Sufferings, sin, and death are all related to one another. The common denominator is that they all plague us. The creation is subject to futility unwillingly. We do not suffer voluntarily, but suffering is ours because we are subject to sin. Paul says we are in bondage to decay, and we know that this decaying process is a painful one. No one enjoys getting old, unless you are a nine year old. In that particular year, double digits are your only saving glory. The

present is bearable because of a future hope, a future glory. You will, God willing, turn 10 within a matter of months rather than decades.

Bondage to decay and present sufferings are transient in nature. What we experience now will not always be the case. Tomorrow brings with it a silver lining for everyone who has faith. If you have no faith, you have no future and no hope because faith always lays hold of what is ahead. It always is forward looking and doesn't dwell on the present with all its problems. How does Paul say it? "But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (verse 25). Faith allows the present sufferings to be beyond comparing with the glory soon to come. That's great news for COVID-scared people. This too shall pass away, even though it may still be present with us a little while. Decay is our lot in life, but it is not the final word for Christians. The pains of childbearing are soon forgotten once the child is born. The outcome far outweighs the income. Suffering is not worthy comparing with glory.

Our current dilemma is that glory seems far, far away so that present sufferings and bondage to decay cloud our thinking and overcome our hope. People hope that viruses will go away and be no more, but sickness is here to stay. Death is proof that sufferings and sin are far from being a past reality. The Christian reality is that we deal with death and sin and sufferings in a way the world cannot deal with them. Though sufferings are present and decay is inescapable, God is Lord of the past, present, and future. Jesus became a man and He suffered horrifically in our place. He was in bondage to decay according to the flesh, but as the Son of God He knows nothing of decay. On the cross He died, but God raised Him from the dead.

What precipitates Paul's mention of a glory that far outweighs the present predicament is unclear from the text. For him to make mention of it presupposes some earlier discussion among the saints at Rome that suggests the opposite. Sufferings have a way of consuming and overwhelming any thought of a future void of them. The glory to come is not seen, so it tends to be less thought of than

suffering in the present. Paul spins the thing on its top. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." For the apostle, future revelation and the unknown is greater than that which has already been revealed and is known. How is this so? You go to the store and find a vacuum cleaner you like sitting on the shelf. The salesperson says there is a better model on the market, but you have to wait another 60 days to get it. Meanwhile, your house needs cleaning. Will you settle for the one you can see and touch and purchase today, or are you patient enough to wait for something a salesperson whom you do not know can only tell you about?

The curse of sin that has corrupted and warped the creation within which we live lead us to believe that what you see is what you get. Present sufferings have been present with us for a very long time. We surmise that they will not be going away any sooner that Corona virus will be ancient history by 2021. That doesn't give us much hope, not much good news! But our faith in the Lord and His word of promise are reason for rejoicing. Present sufferings will not stretch on forever, but will is the great and grander glory be a thing of the past. Eternity doesn't consider our current corrupted nature a thing worthy of mentioning. Glory will always out trump suffering. Freedom from bondage to sin and decay will be restored and remain for creation such that our present is swallowed up in the works of Christ. In this hope we are saved, even if we have to wait for it to be seen and known. This is good news for all who are weary and heavy laden by the cares and occupations of life. We wait eagerly for the adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies.

So while you and I are embroiled in a COVID battle that impacts so much of society, we are not ones who live without hope. Despair over the present is not our mode of operation because hope does not disappoint. We have a Savior who works all things for our good, for those who are called according to His purpose. Our present does not define our future any more than the past. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Nothing in all creation compares to Him! Amen.