

“WAITING FOR THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODIES.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

October 13, 2024, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Romans 8:18-28

Introduction.

I am aware we have been over this passage in previous sermons, but I have a particular reason for wanting to return to this passage one more time.

I have been burdened by the number of significant prayer concerns we have had as a church family. We have had several cancer related concerns we have been praying for Glenn G and Glen B, for missionaries Kevin B and Al M, and especially three young fathers, Darren G, Nate S and Brent B.

Then there are more long-term health issues on our hearts, John M, Linda F, Carol P, Willie/Grace, Mick/LenaMarie, Myrna B, Ruth B, and now Greta E.

I know that on October 24 Levi Bis having his third open heart surgery for a valve replacement at Children's Hospital.

As if our souls aren't burdened and groaning enough, we have the groaning of creation in hurricanes, fires, floods, oppressive heat.

Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton have exposed us all to terrible tragedies and heartaches, families torn apart, children or parents swept away, trees falling on homes or cars taking lives so suddenly.

And that is just what we know about. All of us have our secret groanings, our secret heartaches, pains, sufferings, trials and traumas. There are those here who struggle daily to hold it together, who suffer from physical pain, or battle depression, anxiety, fear.

There are those who deal with disabilities and handicaps. How many painful deaths have we experienced? Children, young adults, parents.

None of us are alone in our groaning. All creation groans, all mankind groans, all Christians groan, all marriages groan, all parents groan, all children groan, all of us groan.

I am a pastor who is groaning in prayer among a people who are groaning in prayer.

I want to offer as much hope and encouragement as I can this morning to our flock, for those we know and love and for those watching from a far.

We live in a world where suffering is viewed as negative, something to be avoided. And the Christian Church is no better. Suffering doesn't fit with our goals of happiness, peace and feeling good. Some Christian leaders even teach suffering is a sign you are out of God's will or lack faith or have unconfessed sin.

It is no surprise America invented the health and wealth Gospel, name it and claim, believe it and receive it.

We need a well-developed theology of suffering. And by we, I mean everyone of us, not just those over 70. Darren, Nate and Brent should be a wakeup call to all of us. The mere existence of Children's Hospital should get all our attention.

We need a well developed theology of suffering and our text gives up one.

But please understand, no amount of good theology can take away the pain of suffering. Suffering isn't suffering if it isn't painful, if it doesn't hurt. We weep and we weep with those who weep. Paul wrote Romans 8 with a deep, personal understanding of the pain of physical suffering.

Good theology won't take away the pain but it will enable us to endure well, to suffer well, with hope, without denying God or losing faith.

Let's take this text and draw out of it the wisdom of God for our help and strength in the face of cancer and sickness and sin and death.

God is in control.

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it.

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.

God is God. God is sovereign. God is in control of all creation and all of history. God is the one who subjected creation to groaning and He is the one redeeming it.

Nothing is outside of God and God's rule. There are no stray cells or viruses, no stray bullets or hurricanes or tornadoes, no random events. There is nothing God is not ruling and reigning over. Even Satan is on a leash held by God.

Deuteronomy 32:39 I am he, and there is no God beside me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal; and there is no one who can deliver from my hand.

God controls who gets sick, when they get sick, how they get sick, how long and how painful their sickness is, and when and how they are healed or not. All of these decisions are for God's glory and for the good of those who love Him.

We do not live in a world controlled by fate or chance or Satan or cosmic forces. God is sovereign and God is good. We can have hope because of what we know about the character of God.

All our suffering is because of sin.

Ever since the fall all of creation has been cursed and subjected to waiting and longing to be free from its bondage to corruption. The groaning of creation and our own inward groaning, the suffering of every human being reminds us of the horror and ugliness of sin and evil and immorality.

The groanings of creation and of this life are meant to create in us a longing for what is to come and to detach us from the things of this life which are trivial and temporary and temporal as we wait for our full and final adoption and the redemption of our bodies and freedom of the glory of our inheritance.

Our groanings remind us every day of the beauty and hope of the Gospel and the profound saving grace of God and what it is He has saved you from, from the ugliness of sin and death.

Suffering is not permanent.

There was a time when there was no suffering or pain, and there is a time in the future when there will be no suffering or pain. Sickness was not part of the original design of creation and sickness is not part of God's final plan for this world and our lives.

Creation will be set free from its bondage to decay, all creation will obtain the freedom of glory.

There is a final great and glorious day when there will be no more chemo treatments, no more dialysis, no more pills or prescriptions, no more wheelchairs, walkers or canes, no more surgery or physical therapy, no more hospitals or care homes. No more viruses, bacteria, antibiotics, antidepressants. No more pain pills.

All the children of God live in hope of that day when we will receive the full adoption and the redemption of their bodies.

Philippians 3:20–21 Our citizenship is in heaven from which we await a Savior, the Lord, Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our lowliness to be like the body of his glory.

1 Corinthians 15:52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed.

Matthew 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Revelation 21:4-5 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Because God is the one who subjected creation to suffering, God is the only one who can heal it and heal us, either now or in the end.

Because Jesus Christ is the resurrected one, He is the only one who can conquer death for us and give us the hope of eternal life with Him.

God has a purpose for all our suffering.

28 We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

We all have plans for our life, and those plans don't include suffering and pain. But God's plans are not always our plans. God is working all things for our salvation and for our final glory.

Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

We know God is infinitely good and infinitely wise, so whatever God permits or allows or causes, He does so for a reason, a reason designed just for us.

There has never been a suffering from which God has not brought good. Your suffering testifies that you are children of God and you are an heir. Your present pain is for the sake of future glory.

You are not a victim of some germ cell or mutation or accident or chance misfortune. In God's world everything has meaning.

Isaiah 46:8-10 "Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors,
9 remember the former things of old;
for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,
10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'

This is what makes our theology of suffering solid, firm, unchanging, unwavering. God is God and God is good.

Don't waste your suffering.

Since God is God and God is good, don't waste what God is using for His glory and our good and our salvation.

Since all suffering has a divine and spiritual purpose, let us strive not to waste our suffering, not to waste our trials and tests, not to waste our cancer and sickness.

There are many ways we can waste our suffering, our afflictions, our pain.

We can waste it by not believing God is in control and has designed it purposefully for us.

We will waste our sickness or suffering if we put all our hope in doctors or medicines or surgeries or any other man-centered means.

We will waste our suffering if we spend more time researching and Googling it than we do pursuing God and pressing into Him and His Word.

We will waste our suffering if it doesn't make us want to know and love God more, and deepen our relationship with God, and long more for the life to come than hanging on to this life.

We will waste our suffering if it doesn't make us hate our sin more, make us lose our appetite for the pleasures of sin.

We will waste our suffering if it doesn't change us, if it doesn't get us to think more seriously about life and death, about what matters and what doesn't.

We will waste our sickness if it drives us into mindless distractions and entertainment, TV and videos. When I was a volunteer chaplain at a birthing center next to our church in OKC, I was saddened to see how in one of the most significant and special times in a couple's life, the birth of a baby, they had the constant distraction of the TV on.

We waste our sickness if we just have a bad attitude, if we just grumble, complain, despair, worry, have resentment or anxiety or fear. These things must be removed by the power of prayer and the knowledge of God's sovereignty and goodness and perfect purposefulness.

The way we handle our suffering is a witness to others of our faith, our trust, our hope.

One of the most powerful examples of this was when our pastor's wife in OKC suffered a terrible car accident, with broken bones and internal injuries. Through her pain she greeted every person who entered her room with a smile, with a word about the good news of Jesus, and when they left, with a thank you.

Pray boldly in the name and power of the Holy Spirit of God.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

When you don't know how to pray or what to pray, turn to Him who does. Ask Him to help you, raise the bar, go to the top. Run to God in prayer and plead for help in our time of need.

Psalm 50:15 Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

God wants you to call on Him, He delights to hear from you, and you glorify Him when you do.

Yes, pray that God would deliver you from whatever the trial is, but also pray that He would give you what you need in the midst of it, and that none of it be wasted

Implications and application.

John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

In this life we are all destined to groan. This is our calling, groan and wait. Not just waiting, but expectant waiting. Like waiting for a baby. Waiting for something you know is going to be good. Waiting in hope, waiting and trusting and rest.

We do have a choice in how we suffer.

I wish you all could spend some time with Kristi N. She has been wheelchair bound since she was hit by a drunk driver at the age of 21, 37 years ago. She is one of the most joyful people I know. She is so loving. She greets me with a hug and won't let me leave without a hug and saying I love you. Every day she chooses joy over bitterness.

Romans 5:3-5 We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

James 1:2-4, 12 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Prayer: Holy Father, we are so soft and spoiled, we don't want to wait, we are bitter about our hardships, trials and troubles. Set our hearts on longing for the life to come. Be our present help in time of trouble, keep us from being overcome by fear, sustain and comfort us in all things you send to us. Heal the hurting and wounded, console the grieving and afflicted, protect the innocent and helpless, deliver any who are in great danger, don't give us more than we can endure by your Spirit's power and strength. Through the Holy Spirit give us strength for every duty, wisdom for every problem, comfort in every sorrow, and joy in your purposeful sufferings. Grant this for the sake of your great mercy, in Jesus' name. Amen.