

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
August 3, 2014**

Romans 8:18-25

LONGING!

- 1. Why are we longing?**
- 2. How are we longing?**

**Hymns: 223 – 215 – Distribution: 214, 336 –
Closing: 318**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Romans 8:18-25 –

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

The year was 1943. Our country was struggling in the throes of World War II. Countless soldiers were overseas in both directions, fighting battles and risking their lives.

On October 4th that year, a singer stepped up to a microphone to record a new song. He sang:

*I'll be home for Christmas
You can plan on me
Please have snow and mistletoe
And presents on the tree*

*Christmas Eve will find me
Where the love light gleams
I'll be home for Christmas
If only in my dreams*

The song had an instant effect. Although the writer claimed later that the song was written for anyone who was unable to be home for Christmas that year, military families especially latched onto its words. Many soldiers would not be able to be home for Christmas. The next year, on Dec. 7, 1944, the U.S. War Department released that singer's live performance of the song in a new recording on a U.S. army disc. The song, performed by Bing Crosby, continued to touch the hearts of both American soldiers and civilians, and it earned Crosby his fifth gold record. It evoked such strong emotions for soldiers that the British Broadcasting Corporation banned the song, as the management felt that the lyrics might lower morale among British troops.

The song continues to be one of the most popular Christmas songs on the radio during the month of December every year. Perhaps you have been away from home at Christmastime and have been moved by its lyrics as you longed to see loved ones?

This morning as we continue the summer sermon series from the book of Romans, we will discuss the same concept. **The key word from Romans 8:18-25 is: LONGING. Let's read the Apostle Paul's words carefully and ask two questions about our Christian longing:**

- 1. Why are we longing?**
- 2. How are we longing?**

1. Why are we longing?

We read in Romans 8: *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in*

hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

Where do we need to begin, in this section of Scripture that is full of deep concepts? With the word "groaning." Much groaning is taking place. Even God's creation is groaning!

It hadn't always been that way. If you've read the creation account in Genesis lately, you know that things were not groaning at all when we read: *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* Land and vegetation were green and verdant. Animal life was heavenly, as we even hear that living creatures were not carnivores, but herbivores. The man and the woman were placed into a beautiful garden of paradise that produced fruit and even satisfying work for them. All was perfect. No groaning was taking place!

However, after the first sin by Adam and Eve, creation was changed. We see this is vivid words from Romans 8:

- *"subjected"* – Paul makes it clear that creation was not subjected willingly. It was forcibly subjected by God after the Fall into sin.
- *"to frustration"* – This original word has to do with the fact that there seems to be "no purpose" to it all, when it comes to creation. Futility. Emptiness. What is the point of the senseless things that happen in the created world around us?
- *"bondage to decay"* – This is a vivid Greek word that implies internal decay. Decomposition. Rottness.

In other words, creation is groaning. We see it in many ways. The created world around us can be frustrating:

- In the verdant part of the country called the Pacific Northwest all the grass in the yards and fields turn brown and dead?
- Why do the blackberries take over, choking out everything else and being a nuisance to our yards?
- Why do our shrub beds and landscaping around our church and homes need regular attention, or they look like abandoned property?

The corruption of the created world around us can also be scary:

- Lightening creates dangerous wildfires in our state, threatening lives, burning homes, and destroying forests.
- Mudslides threaten lives and change creation's landscape.
- Tornados and hurricanes rage.
- Wild animals prowl.
- Some of you might even remember the day Mt. St. Helens to the south blew her top on a Sunday morning 34 years ago, laying waste to a large area and the taking of 57 lives.

Creation is groaning and longing to be set free. Why do such events happen? They are reminders that this world and this life are not where it's at. It was not supposed to be this way, and it won't be this way forever.

The Apostle Paul also tells us that mankind has been groaning. We read, *"Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."*

The reason we have sufferings and trials in the first place is due to the first sin ushering in pain, sorrow and sadness. In Genesis 3 God proclaims this after the first sin: *"To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You*

must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

The sufferings that came into the lives of the Roman Christians came from different directions:

1. They came from persecutors of the early Church, enemies who were hostile to the gospel of Jesus Christ and who actively tried to stamp out God's missionaries and God's churches.
2. Sufferings also could come from their own making. After all, some of our sufferings are directly of our own making, aren't they? A sinful attitude, a specific sin, a wrong and selfish choice. We can bring sufferings upon ourselves.
3. And sufferings can come for reasons we don't specifically know. They may not be a direct consequence of sin, but a chastening that God allows for our good.

Yet the point remains the same. The point is that our sufferings of all kinds cause us to groan.

However, we have a reason for longing! And thank the Lord that we do. God has been gracious to mankind in its groaning. Otherwise, the word for today would have to be "despair." Despair about this life of miserable suffering and an eternity of suffering to follow.

We have seen this solution in earlier parts of this sermon series in the words "atonement" and "reversal." In chapter 3, Paul clearly teaches how we are saved by no works of our own, but by the work of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who came as our Savior. Through his suffering and death, our sins were paid for. Through his resurrection from the dead, our forgiveness and salvation have been assured. And our own resurrection will certainly happen on the Last Day! At the beginning of this very chapter, Paul wrote, *"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,*

because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering."

Therefore, we are now longing. We are longing because we are living in the "in between." We are living in between ancient history (when Christ came to win our salvation) and the "not yet." Not yet, not yet, not yet. Parents, you may have had to tell your young children that when they repeatedly ask you when something great will be happening. Not yet!

One day freedom will be ours in complete fulfillment. One day our redemption will be brought completely to pass. One day the glory will be ours. And it is so great that the current sufferings that we have are not worth comparing with this future glory! But we do not fully experience it yet. And creation itself is personified as longing with us for the complete deliverance that we will have!

2. How are we longing?

So how? How do we wait? How do we endure the longing we have as we await the complete fulfillment of our salvation? This is the second lesson that we learn from Paul's words in Romans 8 this morning. Paul wrote, *"The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed... (And) we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."*

There are two words in those sentences that you need to know. They are printed on your sermon notes this morning, not so that you remember the long Greek words, but that you remember the concepts they teach us about our longing:

APODARADOKIA ("in eager expectation") –

This vivid compound word pictures a person's head stretched out. A person is craning their neck to see something coming. They are looking with strained expectancy. They have an eager expectation. Perhaps you've been at an event where you can relate. A celebrity was passing by in a crowded hall. A parade was

passing by. Or, next year at the U.S. Open, golf fans will be jamming the course in Tacoma and craning their heads in crowds to see the golf superstars that will be passing by. This is the picture of APODARADOKIA.

APEKDEXETAI (“waits,” used 3x) – It looks like a similar word, but the picture is completely different. This compound word combines the words “receive,” “from,” and “out of.” The sense is that this is waiting that has left things behind that should not distract the waiter. The waiter is not wrapped up in surrounding happenings and distractions but is really anticipating what is coming!

But is it so? Is it true of you? Are you stretching out your head in eager expectation for your Savior’s return and your coming salvation, or are their days where that fact doesn’t even cross your mind? Do you separate your thoughts and attention from the sinful lures and vices around you, or do your thoughts make a bed with them many days? Do your goals and attention become focused on the here and now, with a bit of the longing of Lot’s wife thrown in?

If so, may God lead us to repent! May he lead us to confess our sins of attraction and distraction that the world can hypnotize us with and refocus our perspective properly.

One more word is worth mentioning as we see how we long for our coming glory. It’s the word Paul closes with, the word “hope”: *“In this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”* Ah, the nature of hope. What is hope? Paul says that by definition it is not something that you see. Otherwise, where’s the hope of it? This does not diminish the certainty of our salvation. In fact, the term “sure hope” is very fitting for this. But “hope” means that we must realize day by day that we cannot see it. A person undergoing the sufferings of this world might wonder, “Why doesn’t God do something about it?” But the answer is: “He did, and he will.”

Our reading uses the perfect illustration: Childbirth. The world is having birth pains. Birth pains mean that pain and unpleasantness

is occurring. Yet birth pains do not end with just the pain. There is an unseen goal that is involved: A baby! Mothers undergo birth pains for an unseen hope, the hope of that baby that will be in their arms soon. Such is our hope, even though we cannot see heaven’s gates yet or hear the voice of our Lord in that perfect place.

We have so many believers in Scripture that we can look to as inspirations in this concept of longing with hope. Two that come to my mind that I often wonder about are Simeon and Anna in the Temple. When the baby Jesus, the promised Messiah, is brought to the Temple to be presented as the Old Testament law required, these two faithful believers who were waiting for the redemption of Israel were there to welcome him. In an age where many had false view of the Messiah’s mission or had given up completely on it, they still had the unseen hope that God would bring their salvation to pass.

Finally, as we close our look at the concept of “longing” in Romans 8, we could say that there is a similarity between the song we focused on at the beginning of this message and our sure hope of heaven. “I’ll be Home for Christmas?” A nice, sentimental thought during the holidays. But today, all of us can sing, “I’ll be Home with Christ” someday. Because of his acts of salvation and his promises to bring us safely there, we long for that day. May God give us patience and endurance until we are home safe with him! Amen.