

Pentecost 10, 2008  
Good Hope Lutheran Church  
Romans 8: 18

From the letter of Paul the apostle to the Romans, we are looking at chapter 8, with special reference now to verse 18, which says this: I believe, that the sufferings of this present age, are nothing, when compared to the glory that is about to be revealed to us.

The Word of God. And we pray:

Father we thank and praise you for your love and mercy, when life is sweet and everything seems to be rolling our way. Help us thank and praise you even more, when our turn comes to suffer. Be there for us Lord, every moment of every day, but especially the difficult ones. Comfort and sustain us, guide and direct us, and point us ahead to the day we are with you, in a Kingdom that has no end. We ask this Father, trusting in the name of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN.

It's a very short verse, in the middle of a very long letter, written a very long time ago. St. Paul looked around at life, and at all the aches and pains of living, and he then said to his friends the Romans, Shoot. Nothing to worry about here. Nothing to be bothered about at all, listen fellas! said Paul. I believe that in the end, the sufferings of this present age are just not that big a deal. The sufferings of this present age are not worth worrying about! Not when compared to the glory, that is about to be revealed.

Now, the Christian faith raises some very interesting and important questions for us. Without doubt the most important one of all is simply this, Who is Jesus Christ? Is He really the Son of God, the savior of the world, did He actually die then rise again; is He really the one or should we, you know, look for someone else. That's a pretty important question to maybe, come to terms with in your life personally. And there are other interesting issues too, questions about creation; about ethics and morality, the proper decisions to make each day, and so on—many important, interesting topics in the Christian faith. But none of them hit you in the stomach quite like the ones that begin with the word, Why. Why sadness, why suffering. Why diseases that claim the lives of small children, why disasters that disrupt whole communities. Why war, why famine, “why me.” Why you, why the sorrow and sadness any of us experience in our lives. Why any of that?

Paul tackles the big “why” questions elsewhere in Romans, but here in chapter 8 he pauses to say You know what? Even if you knew why; would that make any difference? Honest? Would knowing why these things happen really change anything at all for you—probably not, said Paul. So here’s what you really do need to know instead. The suffering ends. The pain the despair the grief, the major problems the minor irritations, who knows why such things exist but they’ll end someday, they won’t be there forever! God will be there forever. And the sufferings of this present age will come to be seen, as nothing much, when compared to the glory of God’s eternal Kingdom, a glory which is soon to be revealed.

So the big question *for today* is, #1, Was Paul right? Are the sufferings of the present age really not worth comparing to the coming Kingdom and if so. #2. How should we live in the meantime?

And the answer to both questions, is hope. A slender word, it shows up at the end of the lesson, the answer to both questions is hope. #1, are the sufferings of this present age *really* not worth comparing to what is yet to come? Is God’s Kingdom honestly that much better? Man, I hope so! I hope so, my hope my faith is in the one who died on a cross and then rose again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, Jesus Christ is His name, who promises to raise me up to new life as well. We are sinners, you and I—we cling to the hope that we will be forgiven, and changed. We are mortal flesh and blood—we cling to the hope that our bodies will also be changed; resurrected in fact! We are lonely, and dispirited—we hope that our families will be reunited, our friendships renewed, our past regrets forgotten. We are careless of creation—we hope that the earth itself will be made new. We have never seen God, and can’t quite wrap our minds around eternity—we cling to the hope that we are destined to be God’s friends, His house guests in heaven, forever, so was Paul right about the future? If we believe in Christ, and hope in Him—yeah. Now about the present, Paul did NOT say that our current sufferings are nothing. No indeed—your current sufferings are very real, and may be very painful to you, so you’re not wrong to be hurt from time to time. But Paul did say, that when compared to what is to come, even your greatest problem should look a little smaller to you, maybe—such at least is the hope of our calling.

And such is also how we choose to live now—by the grace of God we choose to live, in hope. Look, I know there is starvation, and I know there is cancer. I know there are problems I cannot fix in my own life, let alone in the world around me. But I live in hope—so I'm going to try anyway. Care to join me? There are vices engrained in my spirit, and yours, bad habits that have stomped though our lives for years—but we live in hope, and so with God's help we are bound and determined to let those vices die at last. We have sins that need forgiven, there are people we need to forgive—we live in hope, it can be done, trust God and you be the one to make the first move, ok? We believe that most everything this world calls big and important will one day look small, and insignificant, while we also know that the small acts of kindness and love will one day loom large—we live in hope. That means we think that with God's help we can adjust our priorities now and start focusing on the kindness and love, while waiting for the Lord to adjust the world as a whole. In sum, we believe there is a place for us in heaven, though we know it may be a ways away—but we live in hope, meaning we act here, like we were already there. And we're not going to give up, cause that's what hope means.

In a sense, Paul's assertion in Romans 8, 18 is the nub of this whole Christianity thing we've got going. This world God has promised, this endless Kingdom of Heaven—is it really there? Is it better? Will it include me? Does it matter now. We live in hope, we live by faith in Christ so we say Yes. Every time, Yes. Every time, AMEN.