

Notes on Romans 8 : 18 – 25 ‘In Jesus we face suffering’

It is said that we as a nation are a people of animal lovers and one of the ways we show this is by having pets. Whether it is a dog, a cat, a guinea pig, a hamster, a gerbil, some fish, birds or reptiles we like to have a pet or two in our homes. As a family we've had nearly all of the above and one of the reasons we have pets is to train and nurture our children to treasure and value creation as good stewards of all but this is a twin edged sword. Guinea pigs as lovely as they are, are essentially Peruvian fast food. We loved having dogs but the dog food industry with its incredibly vast carbon footprint and the horror of cruel breeding practices reminds us that creation is, as Paul says in verse 20, subject to futility and it groans awaiting its own liberation and the freedom it will know once redemption fully comes.

Today is Passion Sunday and this Sunday focuses on the suffering of Jesus crucified for us and our recognising that we're called to suffer too. If you've been reading 'God on Mute' or at one of the sessions this week, you will know that we have focussed on the Good Friday part of the book. At the start of the video Pete Grieg refers to authors whose books have helped him to write and reflect on how the cross of Christ helps us engage with the 'Why?' question in prayer. He refers us to CS Lewis's 'The Problem of Pain' and 'A Grief Observed', to Ellie Wiesel's 'Night' and a book written by the German theologian Jurgan Moltmann called 'The Crucified God'. I read this when I trained for ministry, and it is an astonishing book. It is astonishing because he argues that the cross must be understood as something which is more than just about individual salvation. The scope of the cross is far greater than that because when God fully rescues us from sin, death and the enemy when are resurrected, he will also rescue all of creation and it will be made new when God's glory is revealed to us.

Gilli and I love to walk along by a river or the sea for the very good reason that it is hard to get lost when you do so and we love to hear the very different sounds rivers and sea make. We find it very therapeutic and the Aquaid video we watched in church today is a revelation of the difference the ministry of the Children of God makes to our world. We are reminded we are to fulfil the vocation given to Adam in Genesis 1, where we are to nurture the natural resources entrusted to us and we are to bless all people through this and especially the poor. The video also explains why creation is groaning. Creation groans because it is polluted and exploited ruthlessly, which often results in profound poverty, but then we saw the difference made when God's glory is revealed, when his creation is loved and respected, and when through his children reveal God's presence and rule when they live and serve him in the Spirit.

Romans 8 is sometimes said to be 'all' about the Spirit, as in verses **1** ('Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus'), **5** ('For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. '), **11** ('And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you. '), **15 and 16** ('For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are

God's children'). However, as we read, Romans 8 is also all about Jesus too. We need to hold both Jesus and the Spirit together and to resist the temptation to focus on either one or the other as both are what new creation, or being in Jesus, is all about.

Romans 8 was written to make us think about Genesis 3 and the Garden of Eden where humanity is described as God's gardeners who failed to look after the Garden. But the Garden is also more than a garden, we're reminded that creation is also God's Temple where he loves to dwell and we are his priests. When we hold both of these pictures together, we are able to see the weeds and infestations that are so prevalent in God's world and we respond by weeping and lamenting as we enter into the pain, grief and sorrow of God's creation. I do this when I think about the tree cut down illegally in the Lea Brook valley, just because a neighbour wanted to have more light in their garden. Or I think of the ministry of BMS in Sierra Leone, which was the prayer focus for this week, where people are empowered to transform their situations and to use their local resources in a sustainable and holistic way. In both I see the prompting of the Spirit turning the groans of prayer into obedience by the Children of God so that the presence and rule of Jesus may be seen clearer. This week we read through the 15 reasons why prayer may not be answered, and it reminds us that we are not to be surprised by unanswered prayer but to recognise the importance of our groaning when we pray. In verse 23 we groan in lament for the sorrows of creation but also as we yearn for our full adoption, the redemption of our bodies and receiving of our inheritance. Yet, it is not only creation and we who groan, in verse 26 we read that the Spirit also groans with inexpressible groaning for us and God's creation to inspire and encourage to pray and live for Jesus in this heartfelt and heartbreaking way.

Romans 8 says we hope, we dare to have faith, but above all what else? It says we are to suffer. We do so because it is the love of Christ which constrains us to love his created world with his love. This is painful, especially when prayer is not answered, but this is the way of Jesus and this is the way of the cross. May we all pick up our cross, follow him as the obedient children of God that through us the presence and rule of God may be seen by all.

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1. What do you think it means for creation to be subject to futility?
2. Why is the cross more than just about our individual salvation?
3. How are we to reveal the presence and rule of God as we live and serve Jesus in the Spirit in our daily lives?
4. How are we to hold together what Romans 8 says about Jesus and the Spirit?
5. Why is creation both like a Garden and a Temple and how does this connect with our groaning, of prayer being unanswered and our living as Children of God?
6. What does it mean for us to follow the way of Jesus and the cross?