

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fourth Sunday after Trinity, July 10, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 18, 55:1-2, 178, 349:1-5, 214:4-5
Lessons: Psalm 25, Romans 5:1-11, Matthew 12:14-21.
Sermon Text: Romans 8:22-25.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I once received a gift of a coffee cup with a picture of a cartoon character hugging his dog and inside the rim of the cup, as you are drinking from it, you read “It doesn’t get any better than this.” That may be true here on earth, as Charlie Brown thinks, hugging his dog Snoopy.

We know that this life is filled with sin despite the fact that our gracious God gives us glimpses of beauty and love and even in the glories of nature we see and experience the wonders and beauty of what God has created.

The Apostle Paul tells us “*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.*” We endure sufferings, tribulations, and even persecution on earth as we wait for eternal life.

But we can be assured from the Word of God that

WE HAVE HOPE THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

- 1. We groan under sin.**
- 2. But we have hope through our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 3. We are saved eternally through this hope.**

In our epistle lesson you heard that hope is part of a long string of the things that are part of a Christian’s life.

Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians – and for us, too – “*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession--to the praise of his glory.*” Ephesians 1:13-14

Not only does the whole creation groan and long for deliverance from sin and the results and effects of sin, but also we ourselves who have the first-fruits of the Spirit: we also ourselves sigh within ourselves, longing for the completion of our adoption as children of God, the redemption of our body. We Christians, having received the Spirit of God from above, have the first-fruits of the future world, of the heavenly glory, in our hearts, as a definite guarantee of the full bliss which shall be ours in the future. “*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*” 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

And yet as one writer put it “sighs arise from the depths of our soul, groans and cries for deliverance. We Christians are deeply affected, painfully touched, by the woes and miseries of the present world. And in this way our sighing represents and expresses our anxious, eager longing for the full revelation of our sonship. We are children of God even now, by faith, through the working of the Spirit. But we long to enter into the full possession and enjoyment of our inheritance above, into the redemption of our body, the complete deliverance from all the consequences of sin. All eyes and all hearts are directed toward that blessed hour when Christ will finally and

completely deliver our mortal body from the bonds of death, when He ***“will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”*** Philippians 3:21”

Christians are sure of the final participation in the deliverance of the body and of the full enjoyment of their sonship. But meanwhile the present time, the time in this world, is a time of waiting and hoping. We have the glories of heaven in expectation, something which will be completed in the future. Salvation is a blessing which we have in hope, which we are sure of possessing in the future. This is the object of our hope, the full enjoyment of our adoption, the perfect deliverance from sin and its consequences is heaven and all its glories.

But if we already had all those blessings, we could not speak of it as a hope, of something to be completed in the future. If someone holds something in his hand, why should he hope for it? Hoping and seeing exclude each other.

Here is the essential characteristic of this hope: If we hope for something that we do not see, then we wait through patience and endurance; we steadfastly and longingly wait for it. At the present time we Christians must wait patiently, with anxious expectation. Knowing the certainty of our future bliss, all the affliction of the present time and life cannot shake our hope. The complete fullness of Salvation is something that will happen in the future. Because it is in the future, it is a matter of hope, and, of course, the future. And so we have no choice except that we must wait for it in patient and joyful expectation.

Paul writes, ***“We were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? The hope that the apostle is speaking of is the hope of eternal life in heaven. We as believers in Christ long for the time when we will be in heaven. We have good reason to long for our eternal inheritance as children of God. Paul tells us why in the words before our text. He speaks of ***“the sufferings of this present time”*** for believers in Christ. He also writes, ***“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,”*** Romans 8:20-23***

Meanwhile, this present time is for us a time of waiting in hope. Eternal salvation is a blessing we have as believers in Christ, but for now we only hope for it. It is not yet for us to see and enjoy. Our text explains that what we hope for cannot be seen with our eyes. Paul also put it in another way, ***“We live by faith, not by sight.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:7. We do not doubt or deny any of the promises of the Gospel. Rather, our text says, ***“if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”*** We patiently wait for it.

A believer in Christ can have the unshaken conviction that the promises of God will be fulfilled. This conviction we have is the exact opposite of the discouragement and despair experienced by unbelievers. How necessary it is that we patiently wait for the promise of eternal blessedness in heaven to be fulfilled, to have this conviction! In this way we can look ahead to anything joyfully and confidently.

God doesn't leave us alone to try to deal with all the problems and difficulties which the next week, or month, or year may bring. The very next verse tells us ***“The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.”*** Although we confidently wait for the revelation of God's glory in heaven, we are always battling with many weaknesses of faith. What kinds of things are these? We hate sin and yet we sin again and again. We are not of the world, and yet the lust of the eyes and desires of the flesh in this sinful world contaminate us. Christ has overcome the devil for us, and yet we feel the fiery darts of the devil's temptations. Though Christ has overcome death, we sometimes tremble at the thought of it. We have fears concerning our church body and congregations even though God has promised that he will never forsake his little flock. Jesus says, ***“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom,”*** Luke 12:32 These are just some of our weaknesses.

But thanks be to God, the Holy Spirit comes to our aid. In the very next verse we read ***“For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*** We ourselves pray for God's help, but those prayers are often weak and sometimes we neglect prayer. When we feel forsaken and our thoughts cannot be expressed in words, we only groan and sigh. We sing in a hymn, “Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, unuttered or expressed. Prayer is the burden of a

sigh,” (The Lutheran Hymnal 454:1). Then the Holy Spirit dwelling in us takes our groans and cries and puts his blessed meaning into them and sends them to the throne of God as an acceptable prayer. These groanings which cannot be spoken come from the heart. Though they are not clothed in words of human speech, God knows what they mean. **“He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”** The Holy Spirit pleads for us in a way that fully agrees with the heavenly Father’s will for us. This is our comfort and assurance every day of our lives.

Hope is an essential part of God’s plan of Salvation. Paul wrote in Romans 4:18 **“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’”** Even Abraham lived through faith, through hope.

As Paul begins what has been called the “practical” part of this letter to the Roman Christians, after a lengthy doctrinal part, he encourages us to **“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”** Romans 12:12.

Even later in the letter he writes: **“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”** Romans 15:4 We find examples of believers throughout the scriptures who have endured with hope.

Faith alone saves, but faith, which is essentially trust and confidence in God’s promises, also gives the Christian a basis for a sure, confident hope.

Faith and hope combine to work patience in Christians as they wait for God’s good time to come, when he will come in judgment to take believers unto eternal life.

We close with a benediction that Paul uses in Romans 15:12: **“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”**

May God’s plan for our lives in eternity sustain each of us through hope! Amen.

(Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for July 24, 2011)