

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourth Sunday after Trinity, July 17, 2011**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 72, 605:5, 606, 421, 536:6.

Lessons: Genesis 3:1-19, Romans 8:1-17, Matthew 25:31-46.

Sermon Text: Romans 8:17-23.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Suffering in this life is inevitable. But the sufferings of this present life are no match for the glorious future that awaits all believers in Christ.

At the end of the six days of creation *"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."* Genesis 1:31

But mankind sinned and destroyed all that goodness that God created. Since that time, mankind has been suffering the results of sin, and because he continually finds more ways to sin, has suffered even more. But we aren't just talking about physical sufferings. Believers in Christ also suffer because they confess Christ. But we need to be reminded from Scripture that

**PRESENT SUFFERINGS ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED  
WITH THE GLORY OF HEAVEN**

- 1. Creation suffers under sin.**
- 2. We believers suffer under sin, too.**
- 3. But we hope – and our hope is sure.**
- 4. All – we and creation – will be glorified.**

Paul is here speaking in prophecy. The glory awaiting us in heaven is something that will be revealed in us. It will happen in the future. It is by and large an unknown quantity to us and to Paul. We can't know or comprehend it fully. And it can't be adequately described for us because we have no experience with anything like it.

All the distress, all the afflictions, all the persecutions, all the sorrow that comes upon the Christians for the sake of Jesus, is a matter of but a moment's duration, as time is reckoned before God, and in addition is so outweighed by the glory which the saints are to inherit that it should not be compared to the coming glory.

Paul doesn't even attempt to describe it here. Instead he gives us a feeling for the greatness and glory of heaven by showing a keen anticipation and eager expectation it causes not only in the children of God but in all creation. He says even the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

Paul is talking about things that will happen in the future. We do not read details here. Paul is also using the figure of speech called personification. He ascribes personal qualities and characteristics, such as thinking and feeling, to things other than people. He speaks as if all creation were a person.

*"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* In heaven, when the believers – the sheep of our gospel lesson – are taken to be with Christ forever, they will share in the glory of God.

Even all things created anxiously wait for that day. *"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.***” We can recognize how all of creation is groaning under the sin of mankind.

Paul tells us that even creation is waiting for the sons of God to be revealed. In the everyday world, it is impossible to tell with certainty who is a child of God. It is true that open idolatry and outward, obvious godlessness may make it fairly clear that some are not on the road to salvation. But there are many honorable and upstanding people of whom no such determination can be made. Who is and who is not among the sons of God will become public knowledge only on judgment day. Then Jesus will formally separate the sheep from goats.

On judgment day, when the believers will be identified, creation will be released from frustration. Creation is described as being frustrated because its original perfection became diminished by man’s fall into sin. God cursed the ground because of Adam’s sin and it has been suffering ever since. ***“To Adam [God] 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.”*** Genesis 3:17-18 Ever since that time there has been a constant deterioration. Creation is in bondage to decay. A further frustration is that creation really didn’t deserve this. The whole idea of death, and everything associated with it, did not happen to creation by its own choice, because of its own willfulness. It was God’s way because of sin to curse the Earth and have it produce thorns and thistles. In this way it became hard for mankind to work and this way serves as a constant reminder to Adam and his descendents of the seriousness of their sin.

But now Paul gives us a little glimpse into what the future holds for creation. He says it was subjected to its present state of frustration and hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Scripture speaks clearly about a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell but it does not settle for us with certainty whether the new heaven and new earth will be made of new material or whether the existing world will be recycled and restored. Regardless of how this will happen, or which way it will happen is really not relevant and is not essential for us to know. Paul’s real emphasis here is the lot of believers, what is going to happen to believers. Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:13: ***“But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”*** John in Revelation 21:1-4 speaks of the same thing: ***“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”***

Paul does not give us details about the whole creation groaning in eager anticipation for things to be set right on judgment day. We need only examine what has been created by God with the intention that it should be used for man’s good. Look at how mankind has damaged and destroyed the earth.

We don’t have to look far to see how what God created is suffering.

One example is extinct and endangered species. As a child I was made aware of a North American bird called the “passenger pigeon”. This bird was so numerous that flocks of it took hours to fly overhead. The biggest reason they are now extinct is that humans killed them for cheap food. One report has hunters killing 50,000 in one day in Michigan. And the last one died in a zoo in 1914. As a child I thought that was the only thing which man had caused to become extinct. But that was only one of the most outstanding, obvious, horrible extinction of a species. Sources tell us today that 20,000 species of plants and animals go extinct every year – one every 20 minutes! – most often because of what man has done to kill them or destroy their environments. Any time you visit a zoo, you will likely learn about endangered species because of what mankind – and mankind’s sin – have done to God’s creation.

Another example is pollution. Littering is one example of pollution but more severe are things mankind does to pollute and damage soil, water, and the very air we breathe. A most obvious example: On April 20, 2010, a deep water oil drilling well in the Gulf of Mexico caught fire, exploded, and sank, killing eleven

humans and sending what one newspaper has called more than 184 million gallons – perhaps 200 million gallons! of stinking, toxic crude oil into the ocean and on to beaches and marshes of the Gulf. Uncounted numbers of wildlife – birds, reptiles and other creatures have been affected and killed. And we are being told that some of the birds that are hunted in our very state of Minnesota are at risk because of their migration patterns! An innumerable number of fish and other sea creatures such as shrimp have been and will be killed. Mankind's sin: greed, carelessness, and indifference have caused this.

What we do here in Minnesota – what pollutants we put in the water or the air – isn't just a problem in our own back yards. It can affect the earth and people hundreds of miles and farther away.

Although man was told to "subdue" the world in Genesis 1:28 when *"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground'"* he was not told to destroy it. We could perhaps list other examples of man – and man's sins – spoiling the world. But mankind was to subdue and care for this world and its plants and animals, not destroy it so that future generations would find it unusable or unavailable. These things – making species extinct and polluting our world are perhaps the most obvious examples of how *"the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."*

Then Scripture goes on to say not only does creation groan in this way but we ourselves groan. *"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."* Here we see the point that Paul wants Christians to focus on, namely patient endurance under suffering as they-believers-suffer patiently as they wait for God's great day.

Paul calls attention to what they have already received. He refers to believers as people who have the first fruits of the Spirit. We experience the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He has worked faith in us. And we also experience the following fruits of the spirit: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."* Galatians 5:22-23

Paul uses that picture when he speaks of the Holy Spirit as being God's first fruit. God's sending the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers is God's down payment assuring them that he will also give them the rest of what he has promised, what Christians are really waiting for, and what God had promised to give them. We were even adopted as sons. As sons, believers are part of God's family, becoming his sons and heirs. Here Paul elaborates on what God promised in making them sons and heirs. He adds the idea of redemption of our body – that redemption will take place in the final resurrection when the believers are raised with glorified bodies to live with God forever. That glorious hope is to strengthen the Roman Christians – and us – who groan inwardly, suffering, in eager anticipation of God's great day.

The fact that Christians hope for the fulfillment of God's promises that they don't see shouldn't surprise us. You see, hope is an integral part of God's plan of salvation. Faith alone saves, but faith, which is essentially trust and confidence in God's promises, also gives the Christian a basis for certain confidence that all who believe will share in God's new heaven and new earth.

Sure, we have to suffer. But look at the reward of heaven in comparison. We know we are sinners and even personally responsible for helping destroy the earth. But we also know that Jesus Christ, the righteous one, died for our sins so that we might live eternally in heaven. And that is why we rejoice. Amen.