

Reading: Romans 8: 1-11 and 18-25

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Preaching notes:

The two passages in Paul's letter to the Romans that make up our theme today, both speak about liberation. Chapter 8:1-11 looks at the struggle of sin and the liberation of human nature from the power of sin and condemnation. In Chapter 8:18-25 Paul emphasises the groaning of creation under frustration and hopelessness and in the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into a glorious new future.

In the 7 chapters leading up to and including Chapter 8 Paul deals with the problem of righteousness. When Paul uses the word righteousness, he means a right relationship with God. For Paul the centre of the Christian faith was that we can never earn or deserve the favour of God, nor do we need to. The whole matter is one of grace and all we can do is accept it in love and gratitude and trust. He highlights the struggle with sin and ends Chapter 7 with the personal cry and the question in verse 24, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?", which leads into Chapter 8. Verse 1.

The liberation of our human nature from the power of sin through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit motivates us through our groaning, that we might have a hunger for a

deeper relationship with God. The Holy Spirit produces discontent in us with the way things are, pointing us to what will be.

Not only is humankind in bondage but the creation itself is in bondage to decay says Paul in verse 21. It is caught in a continuous cycle of death and decomposition. Creation and humanity are frustrated, their groans waiting to be given words and meaning. Paul assesses the situation; having heard the same groans we hear. He takes an accounting of the health of the world and God's people. Nature groans in the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage of decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We are saved in hope, "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."

We listen to Paul's words to the Corinthian church: 4:16-18:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

We know all our best days lie ahead and all our painful days will lie behind us then. And so, even on our worst days and in our hardest moments, we know this: *It is worth it.*
Amen.

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