

Sunday May 23, 2020

Scriptural Lesson: Romans 8: 22-27

Sermon Series: Holy Repair Part 1 8:30am

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

I am concluding my last preaching installment on our sermon series entitled “Holy Repair;”

- A sermon series designed to identify the repair needed in both our individual and collective lives so that we may do the work of repair.
- I am also lifting up to you that next Sunday will be a sermon dialogue that will allow other voices to weigh in on this sermon series;
- So for this hour, I am identifying an area of repair that the scripture is revealing to us; with the sermonic goal of preaching to the heart of the individual;
- And so looking at our passage of scripture today of Romans; for my biblical aspiring scholars; the good news is that Paul is undeniably the author of this book.

- In fact, even the ancient heretics admitted Romans was written by Paul; so this piece of information is always helpful when we attempt to discern the literary meaning of these ancient texts.
- And so the word or theme in this scripture today that is really tugging at me on a personal level is the word groaning.
- The scripture starts off with a strong assertion saying; *We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; **23** and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.*
- And so as I read this first opening sentence, I must admit that I had to confirm who this assertion was intended for; the people then or for us now?
- For although Paul's letter was written in the late winter or early spring of a.d. 57 or 58; it seems that

this assessment of the people could apply to our world today.

- For in looking at the definition of groaning; a deep **moan** indicative of pain, grief, annoyance and/or distress;
- I would suggest that the world as a whole is still groaning and it is deafening!
- For the people of Israel and Gaza are **groaning** after weeks of rising Israeli-Palestinian tension in occupied East Jerusalem that culminated in clashes at a holy site revered by both Muslims and Jews.
- The impact of the Coronavirus has caused the entire world to **groan**; but I am particularly thinking of India right now; whose cases topped 25 millions as deaths continue to soar.
- On a personal note, my family is **groaning**; as we weather the storm with our matriarch; my grandma;

who is fighting cancer and determined to beat it and live to the age of 105.

- My 86 year old grandma earlier this week had been unresponsive for three days in the hospital as the pain from her cancer tried to annihilate her body and spirit.
- For the past couple of days however, she has been in home hospice and just when I thought I would not ever hear my grandma's voice again; this courageous woman has been alert and laughing and speaking; leaving me with a visual image of how one beats cancer or any obstacle or trial; you face it head on and do not back down!
- So I lift all of this up to highlight that groaning is something that we as humans and living creatures should be able to relate to.
- For groaning typically indicates the weight of what you and I might carry; physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally.

- So looking back at our scripture; the groaning that Paul is referring to would reveal a potential source for our groaning.
- For this scripture and the entire book of Romans for that matter, had several objectives in writing.
- The most obvious was to announce Paul's plans to visit Rome after his return to Jerusalem (15:24, 28–29; cf. Acts 19:21) and to prepare the Christian community there for his coming.
- The believers in Rome had been on Paul's heart and prayer list for a long time (Rom. 1:9–10) and his desire to visit them and to minister to them, unfulfilled to this point, was finally about to be satisfied (1:11–15; 15:22–23, 29, 32).
- Therefore Paul wanted to inform them of his plans and to have them anticipate and pray for their fulfillment (15:30–32).

- A second purpose Paul had for writing this letter was to present a complete and detailed statement of the gospel message he proclaimed.
- Paul was eager “to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome” (1:15) and he wanted them to know what it was.
- As a result in this letter Paul accomplished what Jude desired to do, “to write to you about the salvation we share” (Jude 3).
- **So in laypersons terms, Paul was lifting up to the people then and to us now, that basically our groaning has not gone unnoticed by God.**
- Paul’s message of salvation was meant to deliver a message to the people; a message of hope; that essentially says that what we experience in this life as it pertains to pain, trials, anguish and so forth will not last always.
- That there will be a time where our spirits will be set free to live on in a place where there is no

more sickness; no more pain, no more cancer, no more distress and so forth; with God eternally.

- So if you remember me in the past talking about high Christology where the emphasis is on Jesus as God and eternal life and low Christology focuses on Jesus ministry on Earth and his Service.
- Well folks, this passage is steeped in high Christology!
- This passage is all about the hymns we sing in Church such as I'll Fly Away and Soon and very Soon and more.
- Furthermore, this passage was meant to serve as a motivator for the people to become disciplined and even wait with anticipation because the best is truly yet to come;
- So in the mean time, the prayer for the people was to remain hopeful, to keep practicing the disciplines of love and light to all; trusting and

knowing that there is a great reward at the finish line;

- For this is the essence of 2 Timothy 4:7, NIV: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."
- **So this is where I will digress some; because I have stayed in this place of higher Christology for longer than I normally do;**
- But I have to tell you....this is still and always will be my sweet and happy place to be in...a place of knowing and believing that when this is all said and done; I will be with my Lord and my Savior Jesus Christ.
- I guess my being a black woman from an ancestry of black slaves; I need to stay that I subscribe to the same theology that was able to carry my people through the cotton fields and the slashing and beatings and the human trafficking before we all knew to call it human trafficking....

- Because if that Jesus as Savior worked for my ancestors and carried them through then, I know that the same Jesus will work for me and carry me through now.
- However in saying this, I also am aware that this type of Christology does not resonate with everyone.
- I realize that even in this worship community that I love; not every one has the same understanding of life, death, salvation and so forth.
- I realize that the Christian message of salvation does not repair the **groaning** of food insecurity;
- The Christian message of salvation has not repaired the **groans** of war, racism, injustice, sickness and more.
- Some may even go as far to challenge me in my theology to suggest that if salvation does not fix anything on this side of the heavens, then why even entertain it?

- Why even talk about a sky God that watches everyone groan and does nothing about it?
- Why even pray to a God for hardships to go away when the outcome may still not work in our favor?
- I know Church I might be going into uncharted territory in the pulpit, but let's be honest; God and God's love and ability has always been on trial for many.
- Just like in the story of Job, part of the tension between humanity and God has always been this idea of God being distant when we need God the most.
- Or this idea that even if you and I do so called right; bad things still happen to us...
- Or on the flip side, sometimes it seems like people get away with doing bad things just fine, while those trying to do the right thing suffers.

- **And so this is when I think it is a great time to mention the significance of Pentecost Sunday which we are in today.**
- So Pentecost is the day the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles, causing them to speak in tongues.
- Acts 2 says; *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[a] as the Spirit enabled them....*
- Jumping down to vs 12 *Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" 13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."*
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14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15** These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! **16** No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

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“In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

- And I am going to stop right there because the last line is the most important...*I will pour out my Spirit on all people...*
- You see in the old Testament the Holy Spirit was thought to be unpredictable and people really didn’t know how to access it.
- There is even a school of thought for some that the Holy Spirit didn’t come into fruition until the New Testament.

- But I stopped by to proclaim that this just isn't true folks.
- For the Spirit participated in creation (**Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13; Is. 32:15**).
- The Spirit gives life to humanity and the other creatures (**Ps. 104:29, 30**). It is interesting that when Genesis says God endows people with life by breathing into their nostrils the "breath of life" (**Gen. 2:7**), the word for "breath" is the same word translated elsewhere as "spirit."
- The Spirit played a prominent role in the long span of Old Testament prophecy. David declared that "the Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" (**2 Sam. 23:2**). Likewise, Ezekiel reported that "the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me" (**Ezek. 2:2**).
- The Spirit inspired holiness in Old Testament believers (**Ps. 143:10**). And Scripture promised that someday God would put His Spirit in His

people in a way that would cause them to live according to His statutes (**Ezek. 36:27**).

- The Spirit was crucial in helping God's people anticipate the ministry of the Messiah.
- The Spirit has been here...from our birth.....in our image.....
- So this means that there is no sky God observing us from above; detached from our day to day lives...
- For the Spirit is with us...the Spirit is in us.....
- You and I just need to keep accessing that Imago Dei within us asking the Spirit to guide us when we are in troubled waters...
- It is the Spirit of God within us that will give us the strength to keep on keeping on....
- It is the Spirit of God within us that even understands our groans even if we don't always know what they mean or why we are doing it...

- Along these lines...an interesting fact that I will leave us all to chew on as I wrap up part 1 of this discussion; In a 2011 study; shouting **helped martial artists grip** with greater force.
- And in a 2014 study, tennis players had **stronger serves and forehand strokes** when they were allowed to grunt compared with when they were told to be silent.
- Perhaps this is how my grandma is able to hold on and stare cancer in the face without wavering....
- Perhaps this is how you and I are able to keep keeping on in the face of our own trials and obstacles....
- So our work of repair is teaching that the answer to our groans is not because of any lack of power on God's part.
- It must have to do with our response and ability to profit by God's gifts.

- God's gifts are not to displace or supersede character and personality.
- They are to develop them....they are to develop us...so we must let people know that those gifts are there.... they have always been there!

Sunday May 23, 2020

First Lesson: Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b

Gospel Lesson: John 15: 26-27; 16:4b-15

Sermon Series: Holy Repair Part 2 10:45am

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

I am concluding the last preaching message of our sermon series “Holy Repair,”; this is a series designed to identify the repair that is needed in both our individual and collective lives so that we can do the work of repair;

- Next Sunday, we will invite other voices in; to unpack all that this sermon series has named and raised and more a sermon dialogue/collaboration that I am anticipating will be very fruitful and helpful for us all.
- So in our gospel lesson today, I am picking up from our conversation in the earlier message; that

helped us to begin to identify the works of the Holy Spirit with this being Pentecost Sunday....

- And from that conversation I am seeing an implicit area of repair that emerged as a result of that conversation...
- And so the overall repair that I feel called to name is the overall relationship between humanity and God which spills over to the relationship between the church and God.
- And why I am seeing a need for repair in this relationship as a whole is because from the very beginning, there has been a strain on this relationship that I am seeing occur all of the way back in Genesis.
- Some may call the incident in the Garden of Eden the Fall of Humanity;
- For humanity was told not to eat from the tree of knowledge and evil and we did;

- From there, the story had been told that humanity was then banished from the Garden of Eden.....
- In many ways over time...it seems that some might extrapolate that humanity has been banished from God.
- For through the Old Testament, depending on how the texts have been preached or relayed to us; humanity tried to win God over by trying to atone for our sins ourselves through special sin offerings; often involving an unblemished animal with specific criteria.
- We have seen an example of an offering being rejected through the story of Cain and Abel; Cain did not provide the best offering as God preferred Abel's; as a result, Cain killed his brother.
- Then most of our embedded theology teaches us that God gave us another chance by way of Jesus; presenting a perfect example of an offering for

atonement; Jesus who was fully human and fully divined;

- Who because he who had no sin, took on all of the sins of the world and was punished by death for it;
- This provided the perfect sacrifice; where all who professes to believe in Jesus will be restored back to God through eternal life.
- So in a nutshell, I would suspect that give or take; this is the cliff notes version of the relationship between God and humanity.
- A relationship filled with lots of ups and downs, highs and lows, break-ups and makeups;
- A relationship that when I flesh it out like this....I am beginning to see why repair is needed in the first place!
- Because I am not certain if God has had a chance to weigh in on this theology/relationship I have perhaps grossly oversimplified...

- However even in this possible critique of my assertion, I am pretty comfortable that I have assessed this theology pretty accurately as I have been in the ministry for over 20 something years now...
- So that means I have heard a lot of Pentecost messages and Easter messages, Christmas Eve Messages and Sunday service messages in general and preached quite a few as well....
- And this theme keeps repeating itself...
- Where if we were to ask humanity's side of this relationship that I am naming needs repair... it would sound similar to what I just shared.
- This idea that God has always been on the brink of casting us all away if it wasn't for Lot who had a kind heart...
- Or if it wasn't for Noah and his family...
- Or if it wasn't for David....
- Or if it wasn't for Jesus standing up for humanity...

- All of us would be excommunicated from God eternally.
- But I have to just ask....is this God really speaking?
- Because this is where our understanding of who God is and who God is not really matters....
- Furthermore, the concept of the Trinity has always stumped folks...not just 6th graders trying to go through confirmation class....but ordination candidates, ministerial candidates, every day folk; if you ask someone...tell me about the Trinity....I promise you there will be uncomfortable silence....
- This is why you hear me refer to God as the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer people because they all are God....
- They are three manifestations of the same God....
- So here is where when I talked about high Christology and low Christology in the past; high Christology looks at the divinity and salvation

aspect of Jesus; low Christology focuses on the humanity, service and teachings of Jesus....

- For me to be successful in cross cultural ministry and any ministry setting, I strive to have a theology that lands somewhere in the middle;
- That represents my theological understanding that Jesus was both fully human and fully God...
- But for me I still need to reiterate that Jesus is God...
- So what this also means is that God as Creator, Mother, Father.....did not need any convincing from Jesus to give humanity another chance....
- For God and Jesus are one in the same; letting me know that the Triune God has always and will always love us...
- The Triune God in fact couldn't banish us even if she tried.....
- For it was the Triune God who made us in their image.

- So just like I could never disown my biological blood children or bonus children for that matter....no matter what they do or will do...they will always be my children!
- I will always love them...
- The same applies with God and humanity!
- You see in effect... just like I often affectionately refer to my daughters as my mini me; the Imago Dei (being created in God's image) teaches us that at the core of who we are, we are like God's mini me.
- So for me that means that the Triune God cannot disown us...
- The Triune God has no desire to disown us.
- I told my daughter as I shared with her my preaching direction on this that if she were to murder 300 people or do some really horrific crime; I would never disown her;

- I reiterated to her that nothing could separate my love for her.
- God's Words says the same towards humanity in Romans 8:38; ***And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[b] neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.***
- So if little ole me in my very limited worldview and perspective has the capacity to have this kind of love for my children, are we suggesting that God in all of his infinite and immeasurable ways cannot?!
- So this is where I am still exploring theologically a sort of new revolutionary way to deepen my relationship with God;
- Because friends the longer I live, I am convinced that God's relationship and feelings towards

humanity is very similar to that nurturing model of a parent/child...

- Where just as I will never deny that Keera and Shaya are my biological daughters and I know they will deny me as being their mother;
- God will never deny His children; and the question that we must wrestle with is will we deny God.
- You see where I am putting my spiritual energy is on this thought; if God is not the One doing the disowning;
- Perhaps we need to take a look back at humanity's side of this relationship;
- Perhaps the repair comes once we make the decision as to whether we will or are owning God;
- For once we learn how to own God; then perhaps we learn how to own ourselves!
- So the way we fulfill John 3:16 that says For God so loved the world that he have his only begotten

son that whosoever believes him will not perish but have eternal life;

- The way we model this belief is by owning our spiritual heritage; that we are made from the same Triune God who said let there be light... and let there be light!
- That we were created from the ancestry of the One who said I came so that you may have life and have it abundantly!
- That we all have the ability to love and be lovable!
- That we all are loved unconditionally because God loves her children; we are His children; and no one can strip our spiritual heritage away from us;
- For like the Maury Povich show that I still embarrassingly watch clips on from time to time on Facebook....
- Our spiritual dna reports reveal that God is our Father; God is our Mother; God is our Creator!!!

- So I ask again....have we gotten God's side of this relationship story that needs to be repaired?
- Do we as a church understand God's unconditional love for us or are we projecting our human ways, thoughts, insecurities onto God?
- And so bringing our gospel more directly into this conversation because I think by now you know my preaching style...
- And so you know I have been talking about the gospel all along!
- But I am seeing a way of repair being made for us in the word Advocate.
- **You see the day of Pentecost which we are celebrating today is all about Jesus leaving the world but letting us know that He would send the Holy Spirit.**
- But it occurred to me that just as I lifted up in the earlier message, the Spirit of the Lord has always been with us, in us and around us.

- It is my belief that because our relationship with the Triune God has been so convoluted through bad theology and just being limited in our understandings as a whole; I believe that Jesus as God knew that he would need to explicitly name that the Spirit would be here; even knowing that the Spirit has already been here and would be here to stay.
- But just as on the top of Mount Sinai when the Peter and the disciples could not seem to grasp what all of this Resurrection business was about;
- My theory is that as humans there is a lot of mystery that we will never fully grasp.
- For example, it is a mystery for me watching my grandma as she ferociously fights this battle of cancer.
- Earlier in the week, the pain was so intense that she literally stopped speaking for three days while in the hospital.

- If I am honest, it was very important for me to be here today and preach these messages before traveling to KS; even though I was not certain if my grandma would still be here...
- A couple of days ago she was discharged to be entered into home hospice; where she is surrounded by so many family and friends.....
- But what I am astonished about, is that my grandma is talking now and laughing and is communicating with everyone now; even eating applesauce!
- She is not behaving like most hospice patients I have been in contact with; even my own father.
- I really thought that the last time I would hear her voice was the Monday when her radiation treatment started.
- Learning that her 86 year old body could not endure the treatment anymore; followed by three

days of sleeping and no communication; I assumed that she was in the active dying stage.

- However, now, she is joking and laughing...causing me to reiterate how truly a mystery this is that I cannot explain.
- So this again lines up with what I have been naming....there is so much that is a mystery to us that part of how we begin to repair our relationship with God I believe starts with this acknowledgment.
- It starts with the acknowledgement that our relationship with God, should never be able to be surmised in a 10 minute cliff note version that I began with; but it is a lifelong process...
- Furthermore, our repair begins with also acknowledging that we may not have spent enough time truly hearing and learning God's side on how God truly feels about us....
- Because how I am reading this text, God is sharing with humanity...I want to be your **advocate**.

- The same Advocate who told the community, he without sin cast the first stone.
- The same Advocate who did provide a way for Noah and his family to still thrive in the midst of a catastrophic flood.
- The same Advocate that was with us at creation and said Let us create humankind in our image....
- In every instance where I have been on the edge of my seat, because the story has suggested that humanity and God were on the outs again....in every instance, I witnessed the Triune God step up with compassion;
- In every instance I witnessed the Triune God step up with mercy...
- In every instance I witnessed the Triune God step up with love....
- So I will ask again....have we truly heard God's side of this story yet?

- Do we truly know and understand how God feels for us and for the Church as a whole?
- These are the questions that I believe if we keep wrestling with and keep striving to answer...I believe at the core, we will find that needed repair we have been searching for...
- For the repair starts with us!