

“The Holy Spirit Prays for Us”

Romans 8: 18-27

Makemie Presbyterian Church

May 16, 2010, concert “Sounds of Spring” at 3 p.m.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption as the children of God and for the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Each week *Sports Illustrated*, is delivered to our house. We (meaning John & Jaxon) like to keep up with the happenings in the Sports World. Now, you all know this about me, I think, I will read anything. If I see it I read it. And so, I read the article on the inside backcover about 18 year old Jordan Burnham who jumped from the window of his bedroom, fell 90 feet, hitting the ground at 50 miles per hour. Jordan said, he was without hope because he suffered from depression. He was desperate to escape. Depression can do that; it can suffocate joy, bully perspective & intensify pressure until a nothing-I-do-is-good-enough belief crosses the threshold to an I'm-not-good-enough hopelessness.

Jordan lived through his leap, was in a coma for five-days and in the hospital over a month. Jordan is back sleeping in the same room he always has. When he stands by the window he says, "When I look down I see a miracle." Jordan is active in passing on the message of hope. He says, "I tell people, that, yeah, I have depression and I fell nine stories but I'm here & I'm happy to be here...maybe that will start a conversation that can save someone's life." Jordan's dad calls his son, "the messenger of hope." Jordan is

trying to help people confront their depression; to make the hopeless take a breath in a fit of crisis.

There are some who say that hope is given to you by some one else. There might be someone, especially when you're young who gives you hope. A mother, a father, a grandparent, a friend, gives you hope. And that may be true? I'd like for you to think about that. Did someone in your early life, give you hope?

I thought about that, it might have been my Grandpop. He never met a stranger, he was a man with a gift of gab. He was very influential in my life. I remember running the corner store for him for a 25 cent cigar. And how he would tell me that no matter how much money he took him, he would help me win the Miss America pageant.

I don't know? Have you thought of somebody? Have you thought of somebody, that's the point of that little recital? Have you thought? Maybe you don't believe that. Some people don't believe that. Some people believe hope isn't given to you by any body its just natural. It's just as natural as breathing. It is a tenacity, a hanging on to life. An unwillingness to give up.

Years ago, my mom clipped from a magazine one of those one panel cartoons. You know just a square. She mailed it to me & I still have it on the bookshelf in the front room. It shows a big water bird, a crane or a heron standing knee deep in the water with some cattails & river grass around its legs. There is a frog in the box too. The frog has his hands around the bird's neck. Just hanging on to keep the bird from swallowing. The caption reads, "Never give up." Underlying that we need to hang in there & not quit.

Just that absolute unwillingness to quit. And some people believe that's really what hope is. Just hanging on. Like the couple been married nine years, no children, but every year put some money in the college fund for the child that doesn't yet exist. Just hanging on. What is that? Just won't give up. Very tenacious.

You can put hope in a cave and say, "you've got to live here." And hope will take the juice of berries and paint on the walls of the cave. You can put hope on a pile of sticks and say, "You're going to live here." And hope will take one of the sticks and carve a flute and begin to play. You can put a chain and ball on the leg of hope and hope will soon learn to draw it to a certain cadence and begin to hum. Just tenacious. Even though it's very vulnerable. Hope is always just

barely here. Hardly able to catch it's breath in a world of economic & political power. Sometimes it feels very cramped & smothered. But you know, hope can live on one calorie a day. That's all it takes.

You read that story didn't you about those Jewish women. During the Nazi regimes that had to build roads. Their fingers were their shovels, their aprons were their wheelbarrows. Building roads. Going out cold frosty mornings on cardboard soles, paper shoes, one meal a day, thin soup. How in the world do you do it? And one of the survivors said, "When we went out in the morning we noticed there was a house off on a side of the road with a window box with some red geraniums. And all day long we said to each other, `when we finish this evening will pass by that house and see the geraniums again.'"

You mean that's it. That's it. You saw the geraniums?

(Softly) "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

Hope is always out numbered. Always out numbered. Barely there. The Bible has some marvelous pictures of it. And old stump out in the desert, just dead and rotten. You look at it real close and just one little bitty green sprout out on the side and you say, "see, see." And Elijah gathers the people together and it hasn't rained in three

years and six months. And he says, “gather the families together and rush home we’re going to have a thundershower.” And they say, “Where do you get that?” And he says, “Look.” And there was a cloud about the size of a person’s hand. About the size of your hand. And he says, “hurry home, we’re going to have a real drencher.” Ha, ha. Hope seems kind of silly doesn’t it?

A beautiful, beautiful image of hope is a little baby, lying in the straw, and some shepherds, the no-name powerless people staring down at the baby in the straw. This is hope? I mean Caesar standing like a colossus over the world, one foot on the land, foot on the sea, saying, “Caesar is Lord.” And here’s God answer. A little baby. That’s it. What is that little baby going to do?

Hope is a miracle I guess. I don’t know what causes it. I do know that you don’t have any right I don’t have any right to ever take away anybody’s hope. Don’t ever, by that I mean don’t ever, take away someone’s hope. I don’t care if they say, “last stages of cancer” no. You just don’t have any right to be **so realistic**. Because hope is all some people have.

I don’t know. Somebody gives it to you. Maybe it’s a part of our created nature. Paul, Paul says it’s from the Holy Spirit. Paul says,

“That hope is a gift of the Holy Spirit.” And you would expect when he says that for him to go into a **long doxology and a burst of praise cause finally we got some strength behind this hope. It’s not fragile and vulnerable anymore. It’s got the Spirit of God back of it. Let’s have a shout of victory.** And what does he say, “Hope creates in us a groan.” A groan. But it’s a special groan. Heh-heh. It’s not the kind of groan that you give when your team loses. It’s not the kind of groan that you give when it rains on your holiday. It’s not the kind of groan that you give when the purse and the shoes don’t match. It’s not; it’s not that kind of groan. “The groan,” he says, “is a groan that’s produced when you feel the difference between the way it is, death and decay and futility and violence. And the way it’s going to be. No death, no tears, no violence. **Total redemption of all creation. You have the vision of what it is going to be and you read the paper and see how it is. And you feel the distance between the two.** And you groan. And I think the reason some people give up hope is that they just don’t like to groan. It hurts.

I understand that. Paul says, “We don’t even know how to translate that groan into prayers. We don’t know how to pray. It’s just

a groan. "Sighs too deep for words." How you going to put that into words?

The groan. Let's admit it. We don't really know how to put it into to words. We don't know how to pray. We are children who've have gotten so accustomed to cake, we've lost the appetite for bread. We don't know what we want. We don't know what we need. It's not that we're not sincere. We're just were silly. How can I pray? How can I translate the groan into words? I don't know. I don't know. There is so much we don't know.

When I was a girl our cow, she was a herd of one cow. But she gave enough milk for the family. It was a jersey cow. Big brown eyes. Oh she was a nice cow. But she would get out & go out behind the family cemetery. In a pine grove quiet with needles, wind whistling through the pines, out back of that. My mother would say, "Go get the cow." "but she's behind the cemetery." " Well you know where she is, go get her." Well I don't want to go through that grave yard."

"Well nothing will bother you."

"But I hear things."

"Go on."

So I would go. And as I left the house she would say, "Be sure not to step on any of the graves."

"How can I tell where all the graves are? It's all covered with pine needles."

And she said, "I know, just take big steps."

And so I went through the cemetery just taking big steps -- I didn't know -- still don't -- I just tried to follow that advice.

We don't know how to pray, as we ought. But we hope, we have the gall and we have the hope, keep hoping. You know why we keep hoping? It's not that we form the right prayers. Not that we listen to the beautiful words of prayers and poetry and song. Nah, nah.

Because the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. I hope you get that. The Holy Spirit prays for us. My hope is not that I pray although I do. My hope is in the fact that the Holy Spirit prays for me. My hope is not that I'm the pray-er but the pray-ee. If I can put it this way, I hope that you won't take this as sacrilegious but according to this text God is praying for us. Amen.

