

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROMANS 8:18-22.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

CONSOLATION IN SUFFERING, AND PATIENCE.

1. Paul's language here is peculiar. He speaks in a manner wholly different from the other apostles. There is something particularly strange about the first sentences of the passage. His words must be faithfully studied and their meaning learned by personal experience. The Christian life consists altogether in the practice and experience of what the Word of God tells us. He who has no experimental knowledge of the Word will have but little conception and appreciation of Paul's words here. Indeed, they will be wholly unintelligible to him.

2. Up to the point where our text begins, Paul has been assuring us in this epistle that through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ we attain the high privilege of calling God our Father; that the Holy Spirit bears witness in our hearts of our sonship, and makes us bold enough to come, by faith in Christ the Mediator, joyfully before God, trusting him to fill and bless us. Then Paul draws the conclusion, first, that we are children of God; next, he says: "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." The second conclusion is the outcome of the first. For the reason that we have the boldness and assurance to call God our Father in sincerity and nothing doubting, we are become not only children but heirs, heirs of God and brethren to Christ, joint-heirs with him. But all this, as Paul says, is true "*if so be that we suffer with him*" (Romans 8:7).

3. The high prerogative of heirship, Paul faithfully enjoins, is dependent on a sacred duty. Let him who would be Christ's brother, and joint-heir with him, remember he must also be a joint-martyr and joint-sufferer with Christ. The apostle's meaning is: Many are the Christians, indeed, who would be joint-heirs with Christ and gladly enjoy the privilege of sharing his inheritance, but who object to suffering with him; they separate themselves from him because unwilling to participate in his pain. But Paul says this will not do. The

inheritance follows only as a consequence of the suffering. Since Christ, our dear Lord and Savior, had to suffer before he could be glorified, we must be martyrs with him, with him be mocked by the world, despised, spit upon, crowned with thorns and put to death, before the inheritance will be ours. It cannot be otherwise. A consistent sympathy is essential to Christian faith and doctrine. He who would be Christ's brother and fellow-heir must also suffer with him. He who would live with Christ must first die with him. The members of a family not only enjoy good together but also share in their ills. As the saying is, *"He who would be a companion in eating must also be a companion in labor."*

4. Paul would earnestly admonish us not to become false Christians who look to find in Christ mere pleasure and enjoyment, but to remember that if we are to participate in the "eternal weight of glory" we must first bear the "light affliction, which is for the moment." 2 Corinthians 4:17. By the words "if so be that we suffer with him" the writer means that we are to do more than exercise the sympathy that grieves over another's misfortune, though such sympathy is binding upon Christians and is a superior Christian virtue, a work of mercy: we ourselves must suffer, *non solum affectu, sed etiam effectu*, that is, we are overwhelmed by like sufferings. As Christ our Lord was persecuted, we also must endure persecution. As the devil harassed him, we also must be harassed unceasingly. And so Satan does torment true Christians. Indeed, were it not for the restraining hand of the Lord our God, the devil would suffer us to have no peace. Paul has reference to a heartfelt sympathy intense enough to enter into actual suffering. He says to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10:32-23): *"Ye endured a great conflict of sufferings; partly, being made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions."*

5. And in the verse preceding our text he tells us that as our blissful inheritance through brotherhood and joint-heirship with Christ is not a mere fancy and false hope of the heart, but a real inheritance, so our sympathy must amount to real suffering, which we take upon ourselves as befitting joint-heirs. Now Paul comforts the Christian in his sufferings with the authority of one who speaks from experience, from thorough acquaintance with his subject. He seems to view this life as through obscurities, while beholding the life to come with clear and unobstructed vision. He says: *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to usward [in us]."*

6. Notice how he turns his back to the world and his face to the future revelation, as if seeing no suffering anywhere, but all joy. "Even if it does go ill with us," he would argue, "what indeed is our suffering in comparison with the unspeakable joy and glory to be revealed in us? It is too insignificant to be compared and unworthy to be called suffering." We fail to realize the truth of these words because we do not see with our bodily eyes the supreme glory awaiting us; because we fail to grasp fully the fact that we shall never die but shall have a body that cannot suffer nor be ill. If one could conceive the nature of this reward he would be compelled to say: *"Were it possible for me to suffer ten deaths by fire or flood, that would be nothing in comparison to the future life of glory. What is temporal suffering, however protracted, contrasted with eternal life? It is not*

worthy to be called suffering or to be esteemed meritorious.”

7. In this light does Paul regard suffering, as he says, and he admonishes Christians to look upon it similarly. Then shall they find the infinite beyond all comparison with the finite. What is a single penny measured by a world of dollars? though this is not an appropriate comparison since the things compared are both perishable. The suffering of the world is always to be counted as nothing measured by the glorious and eternal possessions yet to be ours. “I entreat you, therefore, beloved brethren,” Paul would say, “to fear no sufferings, not even should it be your lot to be slain. For if you are actually joint-heirs, it must be your fortune, a part of your inheritance, to suffer with others. But what is your pain measured by the eternal glory prepared for you and obtained by the sacrifice of your Savior Jesus Christ? It is too insignificant to be contrasted.” So Paul makes all earthly suffering infinitely small – a drop, a tiny spark, so to speak; but of yonder hoped-for glory he makes a boundless ocean, an illimitable flame.

8. Why cannot we take his view of the insignificance of our afflictions and the magnitude of the future glory? The extravagance of our conduct is apparent in the fact that but a harsh word uttered by one to his fellow will make the injured one ready to overturn mountains and uproot trees in his resentment. To them who are so unwilling to suffer, Paul’s word of encouragement here is wholly unintelligible. Christians are not to conduct themselves in this impatient manner. It ill becomes them to make extravagant complaint and outcry about injustice. “But,” you say, “I have truly suffered injustice.” Very well, so be it. But why do you make so much of your sufferings and never give a thought to what awaits you in heaven? Why not exalt the future glory also? If you desire to be a Christian, truly it will not do to conduct yourself in this impatient manner. If you must air your grievances, surely you may do it quietly and decorously.

9. In this life it must be otherwise than in the life of glory. If you essay to be a joint-heir with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not suffer with him, to be his brother and are not like unto him, Christ certainly will not at the last day acknowledge you as a brother and fellow-heir. Rather he will ask where are your crown of thorns, your cross, the nails and scourge; whether you have been, as he and his followers ever have from the beginning of time, an abomination to the world. If you cannot qualify in this respect, he cannot regard you as his brother. In short, we must all suffer with the Son of God and be made like unto him, as we shall see later, or we shall not be exalted with him in glory.

10. Upon this same topic Paul addresses also the Galatians (Galatians 6:17): Henceforth let no one confuse me, say nothing to me about the doctrine that friendship is rewarded on earth; for I bear branded on my body the marks of my Lord Jesus Christ. His reference is to the signs in ancient paintings of Christ, where the Savior was represented as bearing his cross upon his shoulders, with the nails, the scourge, the crown of thorns and other emblems in evidence. These marks or signs, Paul instructs, all Christians as well as himself must exhibit, not painted on a wall but branded in their flesh and blood. They are made when inwardly the devil affrights and assails us with all manner of terrors and

overwhelming afflictions, and at the same time outwardly the world slanders us as heretics, laying her hand to our throats whenever possible and putting us to death.

THE REWARD

Such marks, or scars, for Christ the Lord, Paul admonishes all Christians to exhibit. Thus he encourages them not to be terrified though they suffer every conceivable wrong, such as our brethren here and there have suffered now for several years. But brighter days are in store for us when once the hour of our enemies and the power of darkness shall come. Our adversaries annoy us now with malignant words and slanderous writings, and indeed they may take our lives. So be it. We must in any event suffer if we are ever to attain true glory. But what they will secure by putting us to death they certainly shall experience.

11. In Paul's reference to the glory that shall be revealed in us there is a hint as to the cause of man's unwillingness to suffer: faith is yet weak and fails to descry the hidden glory; that glory is yet to be revealed in us. Could we but behold it with mortal vision, what noble, patient martyrs we should be! Suppose one stood on yonder side of the Elbe with a chest full of gold, offering it to him who should venture to swim across for it. What an effort would be made for the sake of that tangible wealth!

12. Take the case of the adventurous officer. For a few dollars per month he defies spears and guns, exposing himself to almost certain death. The merchant hurries to and fro in the world in a frenzied effort to amass riches, hazarding life and limb, apparently careless of physical cost so long as God's mercy preserves to him but the shattered hulk of a body. And what must not one endure at court before he realizes, if he ever does, the fulfillment of his ambition? In temporal things man can do and suffer everything for the sake of honor, wealth and power, because these are manifest to earthly vision. But in the spiritual conflict, because the reward is not discernible to the senses it is very difficult for the old man in us to believe that God will finally grant us glorious bodies, pure souls and hearts of gladness, and make us superior to any earthly king. Indeed, the very reverse of this condition obtains now. Here is one condemned as a heretic; there one is burned or in some other way put to death. Glory, wealth and honor are not in evidence now. So it seems hard for us to resign ourselves to suffering and wait for the redemption and glory yet unrevealed. Again, no hardship is too great for the world to undergo for the sake of sordid gain; it willingly suffers whatever comes for that which moth and rust consume and thieves steal.

13. Paul means to say: "I am certain there is reserved for us exceeding glory, in comparison wherewith all earthly suffering is actually of no consideration; only it is not yet manifest." If we have to face the slightest gale of adversity, or if a trifling misfortune befalls us, we begin to make outcry, filling the heavens with our false complaint of a terrible calamity. Were our faith triumphant, we would regard it but as a small inconvenience to suffer, even for thirty or forty years or longer; indeed, we should think our sufferings too trifling to be taken into account. May the Lord our God only forbear to

reckon with us for the sins we have committed! Why will we have so much to say about great sufferings and their merits? How utterly unworthy we are of the free grace and ineffable glory which are ours in the fact that through Christ we become children and heirs of God, brethren and joint-heirs with Christ! Well may we resolve: "I will maintain a cheerful silence about my sufferings, boasting not of them nor complaining about them. I will patiently endure all my merciful God sends upon me, meanwhile rendering him my heartfelt gratitude for calling me to such surpassing grace and blessing." But, as I said, the vision of glory will not enter our hearts because of our weak and miserable flesh, which allows itself to be more influenced by the present than by the future. So the Holy Spirit must be our schoolmaster to bring the matter home to our hearts.

14. Note particularly how Paul expressly states that the glory is to be revealed in us. He would remind us that not only such as Peter or Paul are to participate in the blessing, as we are prone to believe, but that we and all Christians are included in the word "us." Indeed, even the merest babe obtains at death, wherein it is a joint-sufferer with mankind, this unspeakable glory, which the Lord Jesus into whose death it was baptized has purchased and bestowed upon it. Though in the life beyond one saint may have more glory than another, yet all will have the same eternal life. Here on earth men differ in point of strength, comeliness, intellect, yet all enjoy the same animal life. So in the other life there will be degrees of radiance or glory, as Paul teaches (1 Corinthians 15:41), yet all will share the same eternal happiness and joy; there will be one glory for all, for we shall all be the children of God.

15. Now the first point of consolation is that we turn our backs upon all suffering, saying: "What is all my pain, though it were tenfold greater, compared to the eternal life unto which I am baptized, to which I am called? My sufferings are not worthy to be so termed in connection with the exceeding glory to be revealed in me." Paul magnifies the future glory to make the temporal sufferings the more insignificant. Then follows: "*For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the revealing [manifestation] of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope: [For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope;]*"

16. Here is the second point of consolation. Paul holds up as an example to us the condition of the whole creation. He exhorts us to endure patiently, as the creature does, all the violence and injustice we suffer from the devil and the world, and to comfort ourselves with the hope of future redemption. Remarkable doctrine this, unlike anything elsewhere found in the Scriptures, that heaven and earth, sun, moon and stars, leaf and blade, every living thing, waits with sighing and groaning for the revelation of our glory.

THE TRAVAIL OF CREATION.

17. Such sighing and agony of the creature is not audible to me, nor is it to you. But Paul tells us he sees and hears it, not expressed by one creature alone, but by all God has made. What does he mean? What is the sighing and longing of creation? It is not that

annually the leaves wither and the fruits fall and decay: God purposes that every year new fruits shall grow; he decrees the shattering of the fallen tree. But Paul refers to the creature's unwilling subjection to the ungodly; "subject to vanity," he phrases it. For instance, the blessed sun, most glorious of created things, serves the small minority of the godly, but where it shines on one godly man it must shine on thousands and thousands of knaves, such as enemies of God, blasphemers, persecutors, with whom the world is filled; also murderers, robbers, thieves, adulterers. To these it must minister in all their ungodliness and wickedness, permitting its pure and glorious influence to benefit the unworthy, most shameful and abandoned profligates. According to the apostle, this subjection is truly painful, and were the sun a rational creature obeying its own volition rather than the decree of the Lord God who has subjected it to vanity against its will, it might deny every one of these wicked wretches even the least ray of light; that it is compelled to minister to them is its cross and pain, by reason of which it sighs and groans.

Just as we Christians endure many kinds of injustice and consequently sigh for and implore help and deliverance in the Lord's prayer, so do the creatures sigh. Although they have not human utterance, yet they have speech intelligible to God and the Holy Spirit, who mark the creatures' sighs over their unjust abuse by the ungodly.

18. Nowhere else in the Holy Scriptures do we find anything like Paul's declaration here concerning the earnest expectation and waiting of the creatures for the revelation of the children of God; which waiting the apostle characterizes as a sighing in eager desire for man's redemption. A little later he compares the state of the creature to a woman in travail, saying it cries out in its anguish. The sun, moon and stars, the heavens and earth, the bread we eat, the water or wine we drink, the cattle and sheep, in short, all things that minister to our comfort, cry out in accusation against the world because they are subjected to vanity and must suffer with Christ and his brethren. This accusing cry is beyond human power to express, for God's created things are innumerable. Rightly was it said from the pulpit in former times that on the last day all creatures will utter an accusing cry against the ungodly who have shown them abuse here on earth, and will call them tyrants to whom they were unjustly subjected.

19. Paul presents this example of the creatures for the comfort of Christians. His meaning is: Be not sorrowful because of your sufferings; they are small indeed when the ensuing transcendent glory is considered. You are not alone in your tribulation and your complaint at injustice; the whole creation suffers with you and cries out against its subjection to the wicked world. Every bleat of the flock, every low of the herd, is an outcry against the ungodly as enemies of God and not worthy to enjoy the creatures' ministrations; not even to receive a morsel of bread or a drink of water. Along this line St. Augustine is eloquent. "*A miserly wretch,*" he says, "*is unworthy the bread he eats, for he is an enemy of God.*" Paul tells us the whole creation groans and travails with us, as if desiring relief from anguish; that it suffers like a woman in travail. For instance: the heavenly planets would gladly be freed from serving, yes, in the extent of their anguish would willingly suffer eclipse; the earth would readily become unfruitful; all waters

would voluntarily sink from sight and deny the wicked world a draught; the sheep would prefer to produce thorns for the ungodly instead of wool; the cow would willingly yield them poison rather than milk. But they must perform their appointed work, Paul says, because of him who has subjected them in hope. God will finally answer the cry of creation; he has already determined that after the six thousand years of its existence now passed, the world shall have its evening and end.

20. Had not our parents sinned in paradise, the world would never be dissolved. But since man has fallen in sin, we all – the whole creation – must suffer the consequence; because of our sins, creation must be subjected to vanity and dissolution. During the six thousand years, which are as nothing compared to eternal life, all created things must be under the power of a condemned world, and compelled to serve with all their energies until God shall overthrow the entire world and for the elect's sake purify again and renew the creature, as Peter teaches. 2 Peter 3:13.

21. The sun is by no means as gloriously brilliant as when created. Because of man's ungodliness its brightness is to an extent dimmed. But on the day of visitation God will cleanse and purify it by fire (2 Peter 3:10), giving it a greater glory than it had in the beginning. Because it must suffer in our sins, and is obliged to shine as well for the worst knave as the godly man, even for more knaves than godly men, it longs intensely for the day when it shall be cleansed and shall serve the righteous alone with its light. Neither would the earth produce thistles nor thorns were it not cursed for our sins. So it, with all creatures, longs for the day when it shall be changed and renewed.

22. This is the explanation of Paul's remarkable declaration concerning the "earnest expectation of the creation." The creature continually regards the end of service, and freedom from slavery to the ungodly. This event will not take place before the revealing of the sons of God; therefore the earnestly expectant creation desires that revelation to come without delay, at any moment. Until such manifestation the world will not consider godly souls as children of the Father, but as children of the devil. So it boldly abuses and slanders, persecutes and puts to death, God's beloved children, thinking it thereby does God service. In consequence the whole creation cries: *"Oh, for a speedy end of this calamity, and the dawning of glory for the children of God!"*

23. We have plain authority for the interpretation of the groaning of creation in Paul's further words, "the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will." He thus makes all creation – sun and moon, fire, air, water, heaven and earth with all they contain – merely poor, captive servants. And whom do they serve? Not our Lord God; not for the most part his children, for they are a minority among those ministered unto. To whom, then, is their service given? To the wicked – to vanity. The created things are not, as they would be, in righteous service. The sun, for instance, would choose to shine for Paul, Peter and other godly ones. It begrudges to wicked characters like Judas, Pilate, Herod, Annas and Caiaphas the least ray of light; for it is useless service, yielding no good. To serve Peter and Paul would be productive of pleasure and profit; well may its benefit be

bestowed upon these godly ones. But the sun must shine as well for the wicked as for the ungodly. Indeed, where it fittingly serves one godly individual, thousands abuse its service. The case is similar with gold and other minerals, and with all the articles of food, drink and clothing. To whom do these minister? Wicked desperadoes, who in return blaspheme and dishonor God, condemn his holy Gospel and murder his Christians. This is wasted service.

24. So Paul says, “The creature was made subject to vanity;” it must render service against its consent, having no pleasure therein. The sun does not shine for the purpose of lighting a highway robber to murder. It would light him in godly deeds and errands of mercy; but since he follows not these things the service of the blessed sun is abused and that creature ministers with sincere unwillingness. But how is it to avoid service? A wicked tyrant, a shameful harlot, may wear gold ornaments. Is the gold responsible for its use? It is the good creature of the Lord our God and fitted to serve righteous people. But the precious product must submit to accommodating the wicked world against its will. Yet it endures in hope of an end of such service – such slavery. Therein it obeys God. God has imposed the obligation, that man may know him as a merciful God and Father, who, as Christ teaches (Matthew 5:45), makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good. For the Father’s sake the blessed sun serves wickedness, performing its service and bestowing its favors in vain. But God in his own good time will reckon with those who abuse the glorious sunlight and other creatures, and will richly recompense the created things for their service.

25. Beloved, Paul thus traces the holy cross among all creatures; heaven and earth and all they contain suffer with us. So we must not complain and excessively grieve when we fare ill. We must patiently wait for the redemption of our bodies and for the glory which is to be revealed in us; especially when we know that all creatures groan in anguish, like a woman in travail, longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For then shall begin their redemption, when they shall not be slaves to wickedness but shall willingly and with delight serve God’s children only. In the meantime they bear the cross for the sake of God, who has subjected them in hope. Thus we are assured that captivity will not endure forever, but a time must come when the creatures will be delivered. *“Do ye likewise, beloved Christians,” Paul would advise, “and reflect that as the creature will rejoice with you on the last day, so does it now mourn with you; that not you alone must suffer, but the whole creation suffers with you and awaits your redemption, a redemption so great and glorious As to make your sufferings unworthy to be considered.”*

