

# FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROMANS 8:18-22. [*SECOND SERMON.*]

## REDEMPTION OF THE CREATURES.

1. We have heard how Paul comforts the Christians in their sufferings, pointing them to the future inconceivable and eternal glory to be revealed in us in the world to come; and how he has, for our greater consolation, reminded us that the whole creation as one being suffers in company with the Christian Church. We have noted how he sees, with the clear, keen eye of an apostle, the holy cross in every creature. He brings out this thought prominently, telling us it is not strange we Christians should suffer, for in our preaching, our reproofing and rebuking, we easily merit the world's persecution; but creation must suffer being innocent, must even endure forced subjection to the wicked and the devil himself.

2. Could the sun voice its experience from Adam's time down, what misery it has witnessed and endured, undoubtedly it would tell of its heavy cross in being compelled to serve innumerable adulterers, thieves, murderers, in fact, the devil's whole kingdom. Yet it is a noble and admirable work of creation, fit to serve only God, angels and pious Christians, who thank God for it. But it must serve those who blaspheme and dishonor God and who are guilty of all wickedness and lawlessness. Notwithstanding its dislike of such service, it is with every other created thing obedient to God.

3. This is a fine and comforting thought of the apostle's, that all creatures are martyrs, having to endure unwillingly every sort of injustice. The creatures do not approve the conduct of the devil and of the wicked in their shameful abuse of creation, but they submit to it for the sake of him who has subjected them to vanity, at the same time hoping for a better dispensation in the fulfillment of time, when they shall again be rightly received and abuse be past. Hence Paul points to another life for all creation, declaring it to be as weary of this order as we are and to await a new dispensation. By his reference to the earnest expectation of the creature he means that it does not expect to remain in its present condition, but with us looks toward heaven and hopes for a resurrection from this degraded life into a better one where it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption, as he says later.

4. By these sayings Paul gives us to understand that all creation is to attain a perfection far beyond its present state where with us it must be subject to tyrants. These tyrants wantonly abuse our characters, our bodies, our property rights, just as the devil abuses our souls. But we must suffer our lot, remembering that mankind is captive on earth in the kingdom of the devil, and all creation with it. The earth must submit to be trodden and to be cultivated by many a wicked one, to whom it must yield subsistence. Likewise is this submission true of the elements – air, fire, water – all creation having its cross, yet hoping for the end of the dispensation.

5. There is a refined and comforting perception in the apostle's exposition where he represents the entire creation as one being, with us looking forward to entrance upon another life. We are satisfied that our present life is not all, that we await another and true life. Likewise the sun awaits the restoration coming to it, to the earth and all creatures, when they shall be purified from the contaminating abuse of the devil and the world.

6. And this condition is to come about when the children of God are revealed. True, they are God's children on earth, but they have not yet entered into their glory. Similarly, the sun is not now in possession of its real glory, for it is subject to evil; it awaits the appointed time when its servitude shall cease. With all creation and with the true saints it waits and longs, being meanwhile subject to vanity – that is, the devil and the wicked world – for the sake of God alone, who subjects, yet leaves hope that the trial shall not continue forever.

7. We are children of God now on earth. We are blessed if we believe and are baptized, as it is written: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mark 16:16. And again: "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." John 1:12. Baptism is a visible rite and we behold with mortal vision those who receive it; the Word of the Gospel we hear, and we have in ourselves the witness of the Holy Spirit that our faith, however weak, is acceptable to God. But who among men recognizes us as children of God? Who will apply the term to a class imprisoned and tortured and tormented in every conceivable way, as if they were children of the devil, condemned and accursed souls?

8. Not without significance is Paul's assertion that the glory of God's children is now unmanifest but shall be revealed in them. In Colossians 3:3-4 he declares: "Ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory." So long as God's children are here upon earth they are not arrayed in the garb of his own, but wear the livery of the devil. It would be fitting for the children of the devil to be bound, fettered and imprisoned and to suffer all manner of misfortune; but it does not so come to pass. They have the world's pleasures. They are wealthy and powerful, have honor and money in plenty and withal bear God's name and wear the garb of his children, as if having his approval. Meanwhile they regard us as heretics and enemies of God. Thus the rightful order of things is reversed: they who are God's appear to be the devil's, and the devil's to be God's. This condition is painful to the pious. Indeed, heaven and earth and all creatures cry out in complaining protest, unwilling to be subject to evil and to suffer the abuse of the ungodly; to endure that dishonor of God that opposes the hallowing of his name, the extension of his kingdom and the execution of his will on earth as in heaven.

### THE CHRISTIAN'S GLORY TO BE REVEALED

9. Because God's children are thus unrevealed and denied their true insignia, all creation, as Paul says, cries out with them for the Lord God to rend the heavens and come down to distinguish his children from those of the devil. Considering the unrevealed state of God's own on earth, the ungodly in their great blindness are not able to discern them. The doctrine of the righteous which magnifies God's grace manifest in Christ is by the wicked termed error, falsehood, heresy and diabolical teaching. So Paul says the whole creation waits for the manifestation of the children of God.

John, also, says: "*Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him.*" 1 John 3:2. That is, when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with his loved angels and we are drawn up into the clouds to meet him in the air, he will bring to God's children a glory consistent with their name. They will be far more splendidly arrayed than were the children of the world in their lifetime, who went about in purple and velvet and ornaments of gold, and as the rich man, in silk. Then shall they wear their own livery and shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Such is the wonderful glory of the

revelation that the radiant beauty of poor Lazarus who lay in wretchedness at the rich man's gate surpasses all expectation. Upon this topic, see Wisdom of Solomon, Song of Solomon 5:2ff.

10. The hope of this wonderful glory, Paul says, is ours and that of all creation with us, for creation is to be purified and renewed for our sakes. Then will we be impressed with the grandeur of the sun, the majesty of the trees and the beauty of the flowers. Having so much in prospect, we should, in the buoyancy of our hope, attach little importance to the slight suffering that may be our earthly lot. What is it compared to the glory to be revealed in us? Doubtless in yonder life we shall reproach ourselves with the thought: *"How foolish I was! I am unworthy to be called the child of God, for I esteemed myself all too highly on earth and placed too little value upon this surpassing glory and happiness. Were I still in the world and with the knowledge I now have of the heavenly glory, I would, were it possible, suffer a thousand years of imprisonment, or endure illness, persecution or other misfortunes. Now I have proven true that all the sufferings of the world are nothing measured by the glory to be manifested in the children of God."*

11. We find many, even among nominal Christians, with so little patience they scarce can endure a word of criticism, even when well deserved. Rather than suffer from the world some slight reproach, some trifling loss, for the sake of the Gospel, they will renounce that Gospel and Christ. But how will it be in the day of revelation? Beloved, let us be wise now and not magnify our temporal sufferings; let us patiently submit to them as does creation, according to Paul's teaching. We may imagine the earth saying: *"I permit myself to be plowed and cultivated for man's benefit, notwithstanding the Christians whom I bless are in the minority, the great mass of those profiting by me being wicked men. What am I to do? I will endure the conditions and permit myself to be tilled because my Creator so orders; meanwhile I hope for a different order eventually, when I shall no longer be subject to wickedness and obliged to serve God's enemies."*

12. Peter also alludes to the new order of creation, saying: "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat... But according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." 2 Peter 3:10 and 13. In other words: Here on earth men as a rule are dishonorable and wicked and obey not the will of the Lord God as it is done in heaven; but the day will come when only righteousness and holiness shall dwell on the earth – none but godly, righteous souls. As in heaven all is righteousness, the devil being banished, so on the last day, Satan and all the ungodly shall be thrust from the earth. Then will there be none but holy ones in both heaven and earth, who will in fullness of joy possess all things. These will be the elect. This is Peter's meaning in the words, "According to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Paul adds that all creation waits with us for the revelation, groaning and crying out in anguish.

13. But Paul protects the creature from condemnation and reproach for sinful submission to abuse. He says, in effect: “True, it is subject to vanity, yet not willingly.” Likewise I do not desire to suffer reproach as a heretic and a deceiver, but I endure it for God’s sake, who permits it. This attitude on my part does not make me partaker of the sin committed against me by enemies of the truth who reproach me. The case is the same as that of the creature suffering abuse for the sake of him who has subjected it. And you Christians are to imitate the example of creation. The sun seems to say: “Great God, I am thy creature; therefore I will perform, I will suffer, whatsoever is the divine will.” So when the Lord God sends upon you some affliction and says, “Endure a little suffering for my sake; I will largely repay it,” *you are to say: “Yes, gladly, blessed Lord. Because it is thy will, I will suffer it with a willing heart.”*

## **OF HOPE**

It also belongs to the consolation against suffering to be conscious that the suffering will not last forever, but will sometime have an end – on the day of judgment, when the godless shall be separated from the godly. For this life on earth is nothing else than a masquerade where people walk in masks, and one sees another different than he is. He who appears to be an angel is a devil, and those considered the children of the devil are angels and the children of our dear Lord. Hence it is that they are attacked, plagued, martyred and put to death as heretics and children of the devil. This masquerade must be tolerated until the day of judgment; when the wicked will be unmasked and will no longer be able to pass as holy people. The text now continues: *“That the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.” “[Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.]”*

14. We Christians are not the only beings to receive deliverance, Paul declares; the creature in bondage has the same hope of release as the poor, enslaved human being. Sun, moon and every other created thing is captive to the devil and to wicked people, and must serve them in every form of sin and vice. Hence these sigh and complain, waiting for the manifestation of the children of God, when the devil and the ungodly shall be thrust into hell, and for all eternity be denied sight of sun and moon, the enjoyment of a drop of water or a breath of air, and forever deprived of every blessing.

15. So the apostle tells us, “Creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption.” In other words, creation must now subserve most shameful ends. Sun, moon and all creatures must be slaves to the devil and the ungodly because God so desires. He wills for his beautiful creation to lie at the feet of Satan and his adherents and to serve them for the present. Likewise many a sensitive heart is compelled to obey a tyrant or a Turk because the Lord has imposed that servitude upon it. Some may even have to clean the Turk’s boots, or perform still more menial duties, and in addition suffer all sorts of indignities from that individual.

16. These words, “Creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption,” signify that all created things must until the final reckoning be servants and menials, not to the godly, but to the devil and wicked men. Paul himself regards with pity the sun and other creatures because of their forced service to Satan and to tyrannical beings. The created works no more desire such servility than we desire subjection to the Turk. Nevertheless, they submit and wait – for what? The glorious liberty of the children of God. Then shall they be released from slavery and be no longer bound to serve the wicked and worthless. More than that, in their freedom they will have a grandeur far in excess of their present state and shall minister only unto God’s children. They will be done with bondage to the devil. *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”*

17. Paul uses forcible language here. Creation is aware, he says, not only of its future deliverance from the bondage of corruption, but of its future grandeur. It hopes for the speedy coming of its glory, and waits with the eagerness of a maiden for the dance. Seeing the splendor reserved for itself, it groans and travails unceasingly. Similarly, we Christians groan and intensely desire to have done at once with the Turks, the Pope, and the tyrannical world. Who would not weary of witnessing the present knavery, ungodliness and blasphemy against Christ and his Gospel, even as Lot wearied of the ungodliness he beheld in Sodom? Thus Paul says that creation groaneth and travaileth while waiting for the revelation and the glorious liberty of the children of God.

18. *“And not only so,”* he adds, *“but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”* We pray, we cry with great longing, in the Lord’s Prayer, *“Thy kingdom come,”* meaning: *“Help, dear Lord, and speed the blessed day of thy second advent, that we may be delivered from the wicked world, the devil’s kingdom, and may be released from the awful distress we suffer – inwardly from our own consciences and outwardly from the wicked. Afflict to the limit these old bodies of ours so long as we may obtain others not sinful, as these; not given to iniquity and disobedience; bodies that can never know illness, persecution or death; bodies delivered from all physical and spiritual distress and made like unto thine own glorified body, dear Lord Jesus Christ. Thus may we finally realize our glorious redemption. Amen.”*

19. Paul uses a peculiar word here in the text, which we cannot render by any other in our language than “travail.” It carries the idea of pains and pangs such as a woman knows in childbirth. The mother’s ardent desire is to be delivered. She longs for it with an intensity that all the wealth, honor, pleasure and power of the world could not awaken. This is precisely the meaning of the word Paul applies to creation. He declares it to be in travail, suffering pain and anguish in the extremity of its desire for release. But who can discern the anguish of creation? Reason cannot believe, nor human wisdom imagine, the thing. *“It is impossible,”* declares reason. *“The sun cannot be more glorious, more pleasing and*

*beneficent. And what is lacking with the moon and stars and the earth? Who says the creature is in travail or unwillingly suffers its present state?*” The writer of the text, however, declares creation to be weary of present conditions of servitude, and as eager for liberation as a mother for deliverance in the hour of her anguish. Truly it is with spiritual sight, with apostolic vision, that Paul discerns this fact in regard to creation. He turns away from this world, oblivious to the joys and the sufferings of earthly life, and boasts alone of the future, eternal life, unseen and unexperienced. Thus he administers real and effectual comfort to Christians, pointing them to a future life for themselves and all created things after this sinful life shall have an end.

20. Therefore, believers in Christ are to be confident of eternal glory, and with sighs and groans to implore the Lord God to hasten the blessed day of the realization of their hopes. For so Christ has taught us to pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come.” May he who has commanded give us grace and strength to perform, and a firm faith in our future glory. Our faith is not to be exercised for the attainment of early riches, but as a means to bring us into another life. We are not baptized unto the present life, nor do we receive the Gospel as ministering to our temporal good; these things are to point us to yonder eternal life. God grant the speedy coming of the glad day of our redemption, when we shall realize all these blessings, which now we hear of and believe in through the Word.  
AMEN.

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