

Romans 8:18-25

Birth Pain

It is a wonderful bit of irony that on Mother's Day of all Sundays we would read these verses in Romans 8. This was not planned. But here we are.

Moms: Thank you for loving, caring, encouraging, getting angry when we needed that, disciplining us, comforting us, feeding us, driving us around, helping us with homework, protecting us, for being our Mom.

We don't write in our cards, "thanks for the morning sickness and all that other hard stuff. Bringing me into this world hurt you. Thank you for bearing the pain. Thanks for bearing the worry, the prayers, for taking the long, slow road of adoption if we were adopted.

So today, we say "thank you" for all of that too.

The pain of the world is pain that Moms know, it's birth pain. You know it means that birth pain is worthwhile. It has a limit. It can be intense or just distracting. It can be bewildering or inconvenient but there will be an end to it and it will be worth it.

Paul grew up and lived in the day when babies were born at home. So he and everyone in the church at Rome knew all about birth pain. Today all the messy stuff usually happens in a hospital. Then the rest of the family comes to meet the new baby after Mom has freshened up at least a bit. It was not quite like that in Paul's day.

So when he says “the whole world is in labour, waiting, longing for the new world to be born, they got it. Mom’s, grandmas, you get it more than the rest of us.

I have never visited a family with a baby about a week old and heard much about the pregnancy, the labour and the delivery. That is behind, that’s back there, that’s in the past. It is not worth comparing to the joy and glory of having a baby.

The pain of our world is birth pain. Very few people know that. If we don’t know or remember this we are like women who don’t know they are pregnant. We hear about that sometimes. For such women, the pain that comes on is confusing, it makes no sense.

As we feel that pain we trust that it is a sign of new life on the way. Somewhere in it, through it God is at work. He is bringing in a better day, a better future, a whole new world.

Did you notice that Paul describes creation as standing on tip-toe waiting for the “sons and daughters of God to be revealed”. We know what a ‘reveal’ is. It’s when the extreme makeover is done and Ty yells, “busdriver move that bus!” or the person who finally knows what to wear and how to cut her hair goes home to her family and friends, and all the people scream and get tears in their eyes and give these testimonies about how the one they love has never looked so beautiful, never so confident.

Creation is on tip-toe waiting for the sons and daughters of God to be revealed.

But why?

The well-being of creation is tied directly to us. The Bible's story begins in a garden. God made us to be earthkeepers and caretakers of his creation. The earth was to be blessed by having us as 'God reps' or field managers on site. But rather than caring and managing and developing for our Creator we rebelled, we exploited, we wasted and polluted.

Creation suffers as a result.

Creation was subjected to futility so that some day it will be set free.

Here's how Tom Wright explains this:

When we look at the world of creation as it is right now, we see a world in the same condition as the children of Israel were in when they were slaves in Egypt. Just as God allowed the Israelites to go down into Egypt, so that in bringing them out he could define them forever as the "freedom from slavery people", so God has allowed creation to be subjected to its present round of summer and winter, growth and decay, birth and death. It's beautiful, yes, but it always ends in tears or at least a shrug of the shoulders. If you happen to live at the sharp end of the corruption of creation—on an earthquake fault line, for instance or by an active volcano—you may sense the awe of the futile power. Creation can sometimes appear like a caged buffalo: all that energy, and it's not achieving anything. And, thinking of wild animals, what about that promise of the wolf and the lamb lying down together? Is that just a dream? (Paul for Everyone Romans 1-8 Tom Wright SPCK Westminster John Knox Press)

We see the scars and hear the groaning of creation today.

One of our family's favourite mountain memories is of standing on the Edith Cavell trail across from Angel Glacier as a big chunk of ice broke away in the spring. I don't know if my kids will be able to take their kids to see anything like that.

Some still say that climate change has nothing to do with human activity, but that is getting harder and harder to argue.

We are going forward into a world groaning with rising temperatures, rising flood waters, extinction, more intense storms and terrible suffering of the poor. Hunger. AIDS. War.

Creation groans, waiting for the sons and daughters of God to be revealed.

On that day, creation too, will be created and redeemed through Jesus the Christ.

It will forever be the creation rescued by the love of God in Jesus. The life of Jesus will be fully born in us. We will be made over into people who will serve and love and obey and care like Jesus. It's not the glory of great crowds of people cheering for us and calling our names. It's a better glory. It will be the joyous glory of servant hood, of doing the work we were made to do for the one who loves us most of all.

Right now, Pauls says, "Just like creation **we** groan inwardly". We have the Spirit. The Spirit is the very first part of the new life of Jesus. We groan

because the new life of Jesus is being born in us. Our sufferings are our own birth pains.

They are the hurts and pains we feel because we follow behind Jesus in the way that he walks. It is the pain we feel when we are stretched between the tension of knowing we need to forgive and doing it. (that hurts) It is the pain of knowing we must have that honest, loving conversation but being afraid to have it. And, they are the pains that come with the birth of new life in us.

I think it goes like this: The new life of Jesus is a life of open trust. The old life is often a life of relying on ourselves. Relying on ourselves leads to loneliness. Which hurts until we reach out to God and to others. The birth of trust takes the suffering of loneliness. **The pain is worth it.**

The new life is a life of healthy anger. Anger like Jesus had that deals with injustice. The old life is often a life of destructive anger that tears down. It brings the pain of brokenness. The birth of healthy, strong anger will take our suffering the birth pain of brokenness. **The pain is worth it.**

The new life is a life of stewardship and generosity that dares to give money away. The old life is often a life of exploitation and greed. It brings the pain of having large bank accounts and small hearts. The birth of stewardship may take the pain of a small heart. **The pain is worth it.**

Where do you experience that kind of pain?

Remember, **all of creation** is waiting for the sons and daughters of God to be revealed. Creation is waiting for that day when you and I live again as stewards and caretakers for our Creator.

God is preparing that day for us, even as he is shaping us for that day. It is breathtaking to say that all the suffering and all the groaning and all the pain will not compare with the glory we will know.

Last week I said that it is not God's goal to save only our souls for a place called heaven. God's goal is bigger, better, more surprising. His goal is for his new people made new to live forever in his new creation.

What will that be like?

It's hard to say?

I imagine that if you never knew another pregnant woman and were told that there was great joy waiting for you, you would find it hard to imagine too.

We wait eagerly with creation for that day.

Three things to take away:

1. Don't be discouraged, by the pain of the world or the pain in us. Don't live in despair even when the pain takes your breath away. Every mom knows, the pain will be worth it.
2. Wait eagerly, like expectant parents. Prepare for the future, get ready, live the future life of stewardship, care and love already now. Our call is to be in those places of pain and share that pain with hope in God. Our call is to live the future life already right now. We won't live it perfectly. But no one has ever seen a baby jump up and start walking

either. No one has ever heard a baby begin to talk in perfect sentences. So we live the new life now. Even in baby steps.

We've been talking about our call to care for creation. In his book, *The Geography of Hope*, Chris Turner asks a great question as he thinks of the future that awaits his baby daughter. It goes something like this. "Suppose we could leave a story for the generation that will be living five hundred years after us. And we could tell them what life was like and what was happening to our climate in the early 2000's. And we could tell them that we were the generation that finally was humbled enough to begin to care for the earth and we began the turn around on climate change"?

3. This message of a whole new world might sound crazy. And some of you, during this message have thought, "sometimes the baby doesn't make it". "Sometimes after all of the prayer and after all of the pain, there is no baby". And you are absolutely right.

But I tell you, this new day will come. The first person has already seen it. That is Jesus the Messiah, the **first** born over all creation. His resurrection is the guarantee of all that is and is to come.

God is gracious, he is moving his world forward and he will do it.

May the Lord be gracious to you.

And also to you.

And all God's people said,

Amen.