

5.23.21 Pent God's Spirit-Filled New Creation

- Labor. Childbirth. As a man, I can only begin to imagine what it is like, even though I have coached two births
 - But I think we all know that labor is an event filled with both pain and hope
 - And that labor moving from pain and hope is the image that Saint Paul uses in today's reading from his letter to the church in Rome
- Saint Paul declares, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. [8:22]"
 - And I believe that is a word that we have especially needed to hear after all these long months of the Covid pandemic
 - Not just people, but creation itself has been in pain
 - Viruses routinely mutate and evolve and seldom make news
 - Until now, the only thing that we cared about with mutating viruses has been to prepare a flu vaccine for the dominant viral variant that emerges each fall
 - But almost two years ago, something terrible happened
 - The 19th variant mutation of the Covid virus became a terrible killer
 - To date, an estimated 3,430,000 people throughout the world have died from Covid
 - 588,000 people in the United States have died from the coronavirus – that's 160,000 more people than the number of US soldiers who died in World War II
 - And closer to home, there have been 404 deaths in Schuylkill County alone – about as many people as there are passengers in a Boeing 747 jumbo jet
 - The old saying is that one death is a tragedy, but much more than one is just a number, and so the scope of the pandemic has at times been hard to grasp until we compare the numbers to an airplane crash or a war

- The reality of covid was still hard to grasp, until it became personal and hit our congregation and our families
- What we have been so harshly reminded of over these pandemic months, is that creation is hurting – in pain like a woman in labor
- And of course not only creation is broken, but humanity is broken as well
 - Martin Luther once described humanity’s sin, that is Luther described the brokenness and sinfulness that afflicts all of us, as being inwardly curved or turned in on ourselves, instead of being turned outward toward God and neighbor
 - Now just think about the Covid headlines over the last months – from hoarding, to the temptation to selfishly put our own wants before the needs and safety of others – the headlines of these past months have revealed the brokenness – the inwardly curved nature of ourselves and all humanity
- The impact of this pandemic to creation, to humanity, and to ourselves reminds us that all creation including us is in the midst of painful labor – NOT because God planned the mutation, or sent the virus as some kind of punishment – but because both creation and humanity are broken and are in need of the new life that only God can give
- And so along with creation, we await the end of what Paul compares to labor pain, and we also await the fullness of the future life-filled re-birth that we first glimpsed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- Now the beautiful thing about childbirth, is that it eventually comes to end, and a child – a new life is born
 - That is the future hope of labor
 - That is what makes labor worth while
 - And that is where Paul positions us – in a world and a humanity that is enduring pain, and looking into the future with hope for new life – the life that only God can bring and gift to us
- But now in these days, Saint Paul says, we have been given the very first fruit of new life, which is the Holy Spirit of God

- Today is Pentecost, the Day that celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit
 - And what a gift the Spirit is!
 - The Spirit calls us to faith and gathers us as the church, the people of God
 - Not only that, but this Spirit of God, Paul says, fills in the blanks of our prayers
 - Sometimes in life, in times like this pandemic – sometimes we just do not know what to pray for
 - The pandemic and all the little ripples and great tidal waves that have crashed through our lives, probably has often left us without words
 - The pandemic is not the only time we are left scared and speechless – there are other times only known to each one of you
 - So you and I – we do not always know what to pray
 - But here’s the Good News – we don’t have to know what to pray, because as Paul told the Romans long ago, “...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes 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 [8:26-27].”
 - Yes, the Spirit of God fills in the blanks when we run out of prayerful words, and this gift of God sustains us, gives us hope, and keeps us connected to life in Christ through even the most difficult labors of life, from now, until God’s new creation is born