

7.19.20 L16P7 Waiting for Our and Creation's Redemption

- One look and you just knew that God's creation had been distorted and torn apart by a terrible tragedy
 - Unlike the suffering of creation through things like pollution, global warming, and the squandering of natural resources – unlike the suffering of creation through humanity's mistreatment of God's world – creation itself had lashed out in tragic destruction
 - Standing on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico some years ago, we could still see the devastation that Hurricane Katrina had inflicted a year before on the people who lived along the coast of Alabama
 - Many homes had been flooded and abandoned
 - Many more homes had small trailers parked in the yard so that people could live there while waiting for their homes to be rebuilt
 - And the shrimp boats that used to fill their nets with tasty shrimp from the gulf waters – many of the shrimp boats had been carried inland by the storm surge, and then left stranded and rusting even a year later on dry ground
 - And worst of all, back at the church camp, children used paper and yarn to construct mobiles that which hung from the ceiling and told their hurricanes stories of losing homes, and cars, and eating MREs – emergency meals that were ready to eat
 - When you see something like the devastation of hurricanes, tornados, or as Haven and many nearby towns have experienced, rising flood waters – when you see the devastation, you just know that something is not right in God's creation
 - Some people chalk this kind of destruction up to the whims of Mother Nature lashing out and careening out of control
 - But other people are more specific – other people decide that God has turned God's own creation against us as some kind of punishment or tribulation
- But Saint Paul says something very different

- Instead of Mother Nature lashing out...
- Instead of God turning creation against us to inflict punishment or to test us with trials and tribulation...
- Instead of all that, in today's reading from his letter to the Romans Paul says that not only have all people been infected and distorted by sin, but ALSO – also that creation itself has been harmed and put in bondage by the power sin
- Listen to what Paul says: "...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 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory 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, the redemption of our bodies. [12:19-23]"
- Did you hear that?
 - Paul describes creation as subject to futility
 - Paul says that creation is ensnared in bondage and decay
 - Saint Paul says that creation groans for freedom like a woman in labor pains
- Creation is like us!
- Creation is in bondage to sin, and creation waits in hope for God's redemption
- And not just any redemption or any freedom, but perhaps nowhere else in the entire New Testament of scriptures is the Good News of Jesus Christ proclaimed more clearly than in this letter that Paul long ago sent to the Romans, and which like the saints of old we now get to hear as we gather for worship
- The Good News of Jesus Christ is that in the cross, Jesus Christ has taken both our and also creation's sin and brokenness to the grave *and he left that sin behind in the grave*
- And here's the rest of the Good News of this Jesus Christ who was crucified and raised – this resurrected

Christ is on a mission not only to redeem and set us free from bondage from sin and death, but this risen Christ is ALSO on a mission to redeem and restore the brokenness of creation

- And so this Good News of Jesus Christ crucified and raised is the source of faith and hope for both us with our wounds, and also for a world that so often spins out of control
- And of course as terrible as the destruction was when Hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coast fifteen years ago, the death toll in the United States due to the coronavirus is even higher
 - Let me take a little poll
 - Take a guess about how many more people have died in the US from the coronavirus than from Hurricane Katrina
 - Pick a multiplier – take a guess of about how many times more people in the United States have died from covid-19 than Hurricane Katrina
 - Got your number?
 - Let's start small, show of hands – how many think coronavirus has taken twice as many lives as Katrina? Now many 10 times as many? How many 50 times as many? How about 100 times as many?
 - Today, the coronavirus has taken about 78 times the number of lives as Katrina, and at the current pace the death toll will be 100 times as many people as Katrina in about three weeks
- Now... NOW, as awful as those numbers are, as Christians who have been entrusted with the Good News of Jesus Christ, as the church which God uses to proclaim that Good News through both our actions and words, we have a message of comfort not only for ourselves, but a message of comfort and hope for our neighborhood, for our country, and for the rest of God's world to hear
 - In the spread of covid-19 Mother Nature is NOT showing who's boss
 - In this time of coronavirus God is NOT inflicting punishment or tribulation
 - In this time of pandemic God has already shown love for both humanity and the creation in the death and

resurrection of Jesus Christ, and now God has called us now more than ever to share the message of God's love and hope with the world

- Now I know that it is so easy for us to get down, and to be anxious or depressed as we live smaller and more restricted lives
- Yet Paul would have us hear the promise of hope in Jesus Christ
- And God would have us share that promise of hope with our neighbors in the midst of a world that is still in the process of giving birth to God's new creation