

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

When I worked in Sacramento, my company put in a fitness center for the use of all of who worked there. I used it just about every day for years, even going in on my day off, or holidays. I lifted weights, used stationary bicycles, went up countless flights of stairs on a stair master, I did it all. We had both free weights and weight machines, I usually used the weight machines because they were much easier to adjust. I remember watching some the folks who worked out, both men and women. I was usually pretty quiet in my workouts, just sweating, but no grunting or groaning. Some of those folks though were lifting incredible amounts of weights, maybe twice my weight, surrounded by folks who lifting with them, who were spotting them as they lifted. I heard a lot of groans from those guys as they strained to get a weight up, or as they strained to get back up from a deep knee bend with heavy weights on their shoulders.

In a way those groans reminded me of the sound some of our trucks would make as they carried heavy loads of newspapers up into the Sierra Nevada foothills and mountains. The trucks would seem to groan as at points, they inched their way up the roads to their final destinations.

And many people, moms and dads both, have talked about the groans that can come when a woman is in labor. All of these groans, from weight lifters groaning as new muscle is created, trucks groaning, straining toward a destination, women giving birth, all of these groans are the sound of creation, just as Paul tells us this morning in his letter to the Romans: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now."

Now those of you who have been through labor may not think too much of Paul's metaphor here, but nevertheless it is a vivid image because it reminds us of creation. Creation is hard, difficult, laborious (pun intended). Now the Apostle Paul reminds that "creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God..." Creation waits, there is a period that we are in, a gap if you will, and in that gap that we sometimes express as the "already, not yet" creation groans, we groan, because we are in a time where we toil and wait.

We're in the gap, we are not yet what God intends, but this is where we find ourselves. We live in hope as we wait. Paul saw the fulfillment of creation in Christ, but we see ourselves in a gap filled with injustice, refugees, suffering and illness, violence, war, and abject poverty. Paul exhorted his brothers and sisters in Rome to live in the Spirit because he had seen the glory that waits. What's life in the Spirit? It's living confidently that through Jesus we work against hatred, work against violence, work for justice, life in the spirit is humbly walking beside our God, doing justice and loving mercy. This is how we are called to live in the period of waiting with hopeful expectation.

And Jesus speaks of life in this period as he compares the kingdom of heaven to an enemy sowing weeds among the wheat. An image of fields of grain; wheat, bread a basic food. Yet there are weeds among the wheat, and in the early stages of growth, the weeds are indistinguishable from the wheat. My Bible dictionary tells me these weeds were probably darnel, poisonous and very similar to wheat, until wheat is near harvest. So here we find ourselves, in a gap filled with weeds and wheat, one often indistinguishable from the other.

Putting it another way, we live in a period of “what is”, not “what will be”, and in the words of our lessons today God’s love is in the here and now, demonstrated in mercy for the undesirable, for the repentant sinner, for the down and out, for children, for us. And we live in confidence that Christ is with us now, that he died for our sins, and we are forgiven. We live in the expectation this period of time will end, even as creation groans in labor pains. We live in the Spirit, seeing what should be compared to what is, sharing the grace and love of God, walking in faith. Listen to the groans of creation, listen to the song of creation, think about the new birth that is on the way for each one of us. AMEN