

# “Living Freely as God’s Children”

Proper 11-A, Romans 8:18-27

July 20, 2014

When it comes to being a “human being” there are certainly far more similarities than dissimilarities **between the two sexes of male and female. But there are still some aspects of being a man—that a woman will never experience! And there certainly are some aspects of being a woman—that a man will never experience!** And leave it to St. Paul to point out one of these supreme differences to us in our epistle lesson today in Romans 8:18-27.

Childbirth—St Paul is speaking to us here about **the pains associated with childbirth**, not only as something that may be experienced by women and all the other female creatures God has placed upon this earth, but as something that may be experienced by us men folk too, ladies, at least **“spiritually speaking!”** Actually the whole creation, **both animate and inanimate experiences the pain associated with childbirth—as we wait eagerly for the consummation of all things!**

These pains are the **direct result of human sin having entered our world.**

Groaning—St Paul also speaks to us three times here, about groaning. Paul says, *“The whole creation has been **groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly too!”*** (Vv. 22-23) And then Paul tells us there are even times when the **Holy Spirit of God groans right here alongside of us, on our behalf, with groaning too deep for words!** (v. 26)

Throughout the eighth chapter of Romans, St. Paul is sharing with us his great declaration of Christian freedom—of what it might mean for us— to live freely as God’s children—in this world!

- (1) First, Paul wants us to live totally free from all fear of God’s future condemnation!
- (2) Secondly, Paul wants us to live as those whose lives are no longer controlled predominately by sin. And-
- (3) Thirdly, Paul wants us to live free from all despair through the great hope that the Gospel brings to us.

## **I. FREE FROM GOD’S FUTURE CONDEMNATION.**

In Romans 8:1-4, St. Paul writes: *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death!”*

**For those who have been justified by faith**, the condemnation of sin has already been borne for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, through his perfect life and his death on the cross. **The powerlessness of the flesh to obey God’s Law and to live righteously has been overcome by the Holy Spirit, who not only raised the dead body of Jesus to life that first Easter morning, but who also raises our own spiritually dead bodies to life too, already now, so that we may live in a way that pleases God, also making our lives a blessing to other people all around us!**

Paul contends that the HOLY SPIRIT ALONE IS GOD’S PROVISION FOR GODLY LIVING. **Not only does the Spirit empower the Christian, he also is constantly assuring and reassuring us of our position in Christ—as true daughters and as true sons of the living God.**

## **II. FREE FROM LIVES NO LONGER CONTROLLED PREDOMINANTLY BY SIN.**

**Perhaps an illustration from our own American history might help!** Do you know that according to the U.S. census of 1860, just one year before the Civil War, that there were some **31 million people living here in the United States of America?** **Thirteen percent (13%)** of those 31 million people; about 4 million of them, were slaves!

**When President Abraham Lincoln issued his great EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION on January 1, 1863,** three years later, declaring all slaves to be free; of course there were **3 million of those 4 million slaves who were not set free** by their masters at all, because they were living in those 11 southern states that had formed the American Confederacy, no longer believing themselves to be under jurisdiction of U.S. law.

But this did not mean that the **EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION** had no big implications for their lives, because it did! **For the first time ever in the history of the United States, if any of those slaves living in the south, could find their way to safety among the Union Army, then the U.S. Government would provide them with protection and uphold their newfound freedom.** But how different would have been their fate, even in the United States of America, prior to the Emancipation Proclamation! **Under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 passed by the Congress 13 years previous, all runaway slaves would first be jailed then sent back as the “rightful property” of their “owners.”** Not so, anymore!

**And yet it is still a well-known fact of American history,** that even when the Civil War was officially over **that there were still many former slaves who continued to live as slaves on southern plantations.** They continued to serve their former masters much like slaves, because this was the only way of life they had ever known!

**What I am saying is that they didn't have to stay there! They chose to stay there! They could have left and gone elsewhere! Their masters were not keeping them there against their own will.** Some of these newly freed slaves, who continued to live as slaves were severely criticized by other people because they were not yet living as “free” people. They continued to live as though they were still slaves.

I am reminding you of all this, because I believe it provides a great corollary to help us understand some of the **great frustrations that St. Paul was often experiencing** throughout his apostolic ministry too, because he saw that there were **great spiritual freedoms that born again believers were unfortunately forfeiting in their lives too,** spiritual freedoms and that you and I can easily forfeit in our day too! This is actually the gigantic contention of the Apostle Paul all throughout his letter to the saints in Rome.

This is what St. Paul also makes profoundly clear to us earlier in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans. *“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you! So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are indeed the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but as you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then*

*heirs-heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him!" (Romans 8:11-17)*

### III. TO LIVE FREELY AS GOD'S CHILDREN IN THIS WORLD IS TO LIVE FREE FROM ALL DESPAIR AND WITH THE HOPE THAT THE GOSPEL ALONE PROVIDES.

Friends, St. Paul introduces our epistle lesson this morning by saying, ***"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed to us"*** he is once again expressing the characteristic understatement with which he often refers to his own suffering. This isn't because St. Paul was miraculously blessed with a high threshold for pain, or because there was a slightly masochistic side to his personality either, but because he saw suffering as an integral part of God's whole glorification process, and according, all worthwhile.

**Can anyone truly ever make any sense out of suffering? People have tried throughout the centuries to do so. And certainly one of the oldest books in the Bible, the Book of Job, seeks to address this profoundly deep subject for us too.** Certainly the attitude that the Apostle Paul is expressing here finds itself directly in conflict with our contemporary, modern, secular assumption that we human beings should always be 100% free from all pain and live in this world with nothing less than a full measure of perpetual pleasantness!

**We've all heard the saying: "It all depends how you look at it!" And certainly is always many more ways of looking at a given situation than just one!**

Getting back to the birth pangs, St. Paul says that yes there is much senseless suffering in our world, but **Adam certainly did not consult with the animal world, nor did he involve the rest of creation in his decision to disobey God.** Innocent though the creation was, all of creation suffers from the backlash of Adam's sin. And yet, you and I also know full well that the whole creation still suffers today not only because of Adam's initial sin, but creation also suffers from the constant ongoing sins of mankind.

Paul is reminding us that when our first parents fell into sin, that their thoughtless actions set the whole creation into a tailspin. You remember what God said to Adam and Eve on that day, don't you?

***"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I command you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust and to dust you shall return!" (Genesis 3:17-19.***

And to the woman he said, ***"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children." (Genesis 3:16)***

But the good news is that because of what Jesus Christ has done for every one for us, the hardship, the trials, the troubles and the tribulations we experience in this life are only temporal at best! **Yes, earthquakes may shatter buildings, hurricanes may wipe out cities, droughts can lead to human starvation, and an "air-to-sky-defense missile" can shoot down a Malaysian Passenger Jet with 297 people aboard in an instant!**

## **BUT STILL THE BIBLE TEACHES US THAT THE END IS NOT YET!**

Did you hear about that one passenger from the Netherlands named Cor Pan, who just moments before boarding that Malaysian Airlines Flight MH370, took a photo of his and posted it on Facebook with an attached subscription, making a reference to the missing Malaysian Flight MH370 that is believed to have crashed in the Indian Ocean last March?

**NEXT TO THE PHOTO THE MAN WROTE: "IF IT DISAPPEARS, THIS IS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE."**

Perhaps Mr. Pan wrote those words because he was nervous about stepping on a Malaysian Airlines flight so soon after the crash of flight 370 back in March. But I can't imagine that when he boarded this plane he believed that this would indeed be his last day on earth and that when that plane returned to terra firma that it would look nothing like the picture he had just taken of it!

Isn't why the Psalmist prays that marvelous prayer that we do well to pray ourselves? "Lord, teach us to number our days upon this earth, to apply our hearts to wisdom, and to at last be saved!" (Psalm 90:12).

You know what St. Paul says to the Corinthians, "*No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed this to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the deep things of God!*" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

What St. Paul seems to be doing here to me is to be echoing Jesus' own words! Didn't Jesus make a similar analogy in John 16:21 on the night before his crucifixion? "*When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world!*"

A woman had just returned to her home from an evening of church services, when she was startled by an intruder. She caught the man in the act of robbing her home of its valuables and yelled: 'Stop! Acts 2:38!'—"Repent and be baptized, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven!"

The burglar stopped in his tracks. The woman calmly called the police and explained what she had done. As the officer cuffed the man to take him in, he asked the burglar: 'Why did you just stand there? All the old lady did was to yell a scripture to you.'

'Scripture?' replied the burglar 'She said she had an Ax and Two 38s!'

Perhaps knowing the Scriptures can save your life in more ways than one! Amen