

“Creation Waits” – Rev. Peter Paige

Let me begin by repeating Chip’s introduction: We are no longer addicted to sin.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul puts it this way: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Christ has made it possible for us to become righteous. Yes, we can still sin.

We can most certainly reject God's gracious and undeserved offer of forgiveness, but unlike before, we can both know what is right and do what is right.

We no longer live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Paul's language can be confusing sometimes. His opposition of "flesh" and "spirit" may lead us to believe that he felt the material world (particularly our physical bodies) to be bad, and only our souls to be good. The worldview of Judaism and Christianity, however, affirm the goodness of creation. In Genesis 1, God saw what he had made and pronounced it "very good." "Flesh" and "spirit" for Paul are shorthand terms, referring to our redeemed selves and our unredeemed selves. We once lived "according to the flesh" (in other words, as unredeemed people), but now we live life in the Spirit (as redeemed people). Can we still sin? Indeed we can, but we don't have to do so. Christ has saved us. He has done what we could not. So, let me now repeat Romans 8:22-23.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as full heirs, the redemption of our bodies.

The work of the Holy Spirit is transformative. We can better understand the full impact of that transformation by reflecting on the distinction between God's action for the sinner – pardon and justification - and God's action in the pardoned sinner's heart - restoration of the broken image of God and of the human power to avoid and resist intentional sin.

Pardon: You are still known as guilty, but are released from some or all of the legal consequences resulting from conviction.

Justification: In a Wesleyan sense it is the wiping of the slate so that you are looked upon as being clothed with the pureness of Christ. So not only are your consequences removed, through and only on account of Christ, your guilt is also dissolved.

John Wesley saw the ongoing process of becoming ever more perfect as: Sanctification. This is God's action in the pardoned sinner's heart - restoration of the image of God which was broken because of human lack of desire and power to avoid and resist intentional sin.

Thus as we read Paul saying: now – even as we live in our earthly bodies, we can live by the Spirit as redeemed people...being perfected by the ability to and practice of choosing to love others in the way God does.

Let's now go back to Romans 8:12-13

12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation [the NRSV says we are debtors]—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Can we live acknowledging our obligations? Can we live as debtors? Not to ourselves. We hear from the world that – “you owe it to yourself!” Paul argues that our ultimate debt is to God, to grace. We owe it to God's love, pardon, and justification to live into/up to our sanctification. We owe it to those who have loved us when we weren't all that lovable. We owe it to those who saw in us what we couldn't see for ourselves. We owe it to those who let us be wrong because that was the only way we would learn. We are debtors to love. We are debtors to God's Spirit who shaped us, who claimed us, who offers us a future with hope and fulfillment and joy. And we experienced the Holy Spirit most vividly through those who walked beside us every step of the way. Those may have been our parents, our teachers, fellow sojourners, or a combination of all the above and more; maybe it was the church that nurtured us and told us that we were worthy of loving, that we were the beloved of God and it was an honor to guide and shape and love us.

We are all debtors; we like to think we are free and unfettered, but we are bound together in human community. And the truth is that we are better that way. We are able to be glorified, to reach our full potential in Christ, to claim the gift of eternity, because of the relationships we are blessed to live in, and because of the community that we are becoming by each following the work of God in us by the Holy Spirit.

But it is not just the human relationships to which we are bound. We are also in relationship with all creation. That's what Paul says: the whole of creation is groaning in labor pains, hurting because of what it wants to birth, what it wants to bring forth. Of course, we say, he's talking metaphorically, about spiritual matters, not physical ones. Or is he? It seems that Paul is hinting that the fate of the world is woven into our fate, into our future and our hope. Not only that, but all that God has made relies on us—not just us, but our redeemed selves, our lives as the sons and daughters of God—which is a roundabout way of saying that we treat our world as though it were a part of God and a part of us. All creation awaits Christ's return... for there will be a new heaven and a new earth!!

We don't worship the creation or our created bodies. We aren't tree worshipers and mountain disciples; we're not flora and fauna followers: No, we are followers of Jesus the Christ, worshipers of the Creator of all that we see and all that we are. Creation is not God. Yet, we get a glimpse of the Creator when we comprehend the creation. We know the artist when we examine and protect the work of art. We commune with the author when we spend time in the Bible God wrote.

If our bodies are good, and all creation will be redeemed, and we are able to live now by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then we need to take an active part in building the kingdom of God here and now. We are God's hands and feet as the Spirit guides. Be thinking about how you are uniquely equipped by the Spirit of God to do the work of God here and now- with anticipation and expectation of heaven coming down.