



Proper 11, The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
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July 19, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

St. Paul presents us with a striking imagery in our reading this Sunday from his letter to the Romans: he says that the suffering of this world is like the labor pains of childbirth. That is an interesting imagery for at least two reasons: first of all, it acknowledges that the pain we are experiencing is very real and very intense. I don't know, personally, of course, but I believe those who tell me that there is very little in the world that is as painful as childbirth – not only the actual delivery, but the whole nine months of discomfort and pain that precedes the birth. In this analogy the scriptures acknowledge that the world can be a very difficult and painful place at times.

The second reason this imagery is interesting is because, while it fully acknowledges our pain, it also invites us to look beyond the pain which we are experiencing and look forward to something beautiful and glorious that will come on the other side of this pain. As difficult as child birth may be, the child who comes into the world is well worth the suffering.

What the Spirit is telling us is that something new is being created: a new heaven and a new earth, a new life of the world to come, a new humanity, and a new you and a new me. The birth of a new world and a new humanity can be exciting and joyful, and it can also be painful and fear inducing. The old cannot pass away, and the new cannot come, without some pain – but the one who created us, and the one who is making us into a new creation, asks us to have faith that the new world that is coming is worth the struggle that it takes to reach it.

I believe that this reality, the reality of God's dream of our re-creation in his image, is a reality that can give us hope as we struggle through the suffering of the current pandemic. We are now in fifth month of disease, of suffering, of isolation, and of disrupted and disjointed lives. It wore thin long ago. We are now in the

stage of suffering when it is the most difficult to see anything except what we have lost, what we are missing, and what is wrong with the world.

How can we set our hearts and minds on hope in the midst of such pain? Consider the imagery that Jesus has used in our Gospel readings last week and this week: he compares the work of God in the world to the sowing of seeds. In order for new life to begin from a seed the seed must break open – a form of suffering and pain – and the seed must sink roots deeply into the soil to draw up the life-giving water that will sustain its growth and allow it to transform into something new.

We, also, must sink our roots deeply into the life-giving water of the Holy Spirit and be filled with God's life if we are to survive our suffering and be transformed into new people on the other side of this experience.

As in a drought, when a plant's normal means of drawing life from the soil are taken away from it, we are experiencing a spiritual drought. The seeds that Jesus has sown in our lives during these recent months have been sown in very dry, drought-ridden soil. We are in a drought of being able to worship together in person, we are in a drought of being able to pray together in person, and we are in a drought of experiencing even the simplest forms of connection, like a handshake or a hug.

If something new is to be born through this pain, if something beautiful is to grow from the seeds which Jesus is sowing in our lives right now, then our roots will have to sink deeper into the life-giving God from whom we gain all life, joy, and love.

This is why I have returned several times in recent weeks to the basics of our spiritual lives: silence, prayer, and the reading of scripture. These are the means by which we sink our roots deeply into God's life and find the life-giving source of all life; by which we find the love of the one who will bring new birth in our lives out of this suffering. When the distractions from our struggle, such as television, the internet, and compulsive worry have ceased to distract us then we are ready to go deeper with the one who made us and loves us. We are ready to turn way from the distractions from the pain and enter into silence, listening for God's voice in our hearts and in the words of scripture, and being transformed by that experience.

Let us begin to move deeper into God's heart and may the loving voice of the Holy Spirit draw us onward, towards the brighter day that is to come.

Amen.