

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 23, 2017
Text: Romans 8:18-27
"The Hope of the World and Ours"

Last Sunday's reading from Romans 8 ended with the acknowledgement that our lives as Spirit-born children of God are not exempt from suffering: *"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 we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."* (Vs. 16-17) What I neglected to point out was that we do not suffer alone. We suffer *"with him"*; that is, with Jesus.

You may recall that since last Advent we have occasionally heard readings of Scripture that declare to us the good news that Jesus is "Immanuel" or "God with us". *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."* (Isaiah 7:14) *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14) *"He poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."* (Isaiah 53:12)

The God who created the heavens and the earth is with us. This is so despite the fact that our first parents disregarded His command in search of their own way of being like God. God is with us even though we idolize our selfish desires and serve them instead of His revealed will. God is with us not to condemn us for our sins against Him and against our neighbors, but to save us from them. He accomplished that by giving Jesus, His Son, who in turn gave Himself in love to die for us to spare us from the spiritual death-sentence we deserve for our rebellion. Death could not hold Jesus, nor does hold us who believe in Him: *"He lives and grants me daily breath; He lives, and I shall conquer death; He lives my mansion to prepare; He lives to bring me safely there."* (LSB 461:7)

God in Christ is with us, and we, like young Eleonora today, are with Him, our lives enfolded into His death and resurrection through Baptism. We are baptized that we, by the power of the Holy Spirit, may live our whole lives with Jesus by faith, in hope and love. Through the holy name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit spoken over us, God adopted us as His own children. His Spirit rushed into our hearts like water on parched ground, preparing us to hear and believe God's Word as the saving seed that produces a harvest of Christ-like goodness in our lives. God is with us in Jesus, and we are with Him, His brothers and sisters, heirs with Him of eternal life, living with Him by faith given and strengthened by the Holy Spirit through God's Word and the Sacraments.

We live by faith, not yet by sight. God's kingdom, His eternal reign of power and grace is here now, revealed and established by Jesus. In our new birth as God's children and in our faith in Jesus to save us from sin and death, the Holy Spirit gives us a foretaste of eternal life with God. Yet most of the glory of God's kingdom remains hidden by the shades of the world we encounter with our senses each day. It is still a fallen world. After God confronted Adam and Eve with their treason, He cursed the ground and cast them from the

life of peace and righteousness they had rejected. All of creation was frustrated and bound by God to submit to the law of sin and death unleashed on humans through Adam's disobedience. *"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it..."*

We live by faith in this fallen world, looking forward to the coming of life after sin, death and Satan. We live in this world while looking for the better one promised to us by God and prepared for us by His Son. Because the world is still fallen, our life of faith and love with Jesus includes suffering. Some of our suffering mirrors that experienced by our neighbors who live without Jesus. Baptism did not inoculate us from the possibility of grieving for lost jobs or loved ones or being injured in a car accident or killed by cancer. Yet we suffer not alone but with Jesus, comforted by faith in Him to help and heal us either here or with Him after we die.

Living with Jesus also means suffering with Him in two other ways. As the creation is fallen and awaits its release, so in this world we remain both children of Adam and children of God through Jesus, His Son. We were baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus that we may learn to die to the ways of our old nature and live in those of our Lord. Our spiritual struggle is lifelong and sometimes painfully trying. We suffer with Jesus daily as we say "no" to ourselves and "yes" to the Lord in hope of the day when we will be fully freed from the fallen nature of Adam forever.

Living by faith in Jesus also puts us in conflict with our neighbors who know nothing more than the ways of Adam. The morality of our times is such a matter of personal choice today that our witness to God's will revealed in His commands is intolerable for many. Even the good news that Jesus is our Savior offends those who believe that all religions are equally valid and that people are basically good and capable of bettering themselves. As we express our faith in Christ in action and in words, we get "pushback" sometimes. It hurts. Its injustice angers us. Yet we can endure every form of persecution because when we suffer it, we suffer it *with* Jesus, *"who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. [We can] consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that [we] may not grow weary or fainthearted."* (Hebrews 12:2-3)

Living with Jesus is not easy, not yet. Yet nor is it unrelenting darkness, crushing burdens, or futile self-deception. The death of Jesus crushed the evil head of sin, death and the devil beyond repair. His resurrection opened the door of God's kingdom to all believers. Baptism set us free belong to God and live with Jesus as God's own people forever. God's kingdom is here and still coming. Living with Jesus is living in hope.

Living by faith in Jesus is living in hope for the glory of God's kingdom to be revealed. The time of this world's fallen state grows shorter every day, and all God has made longs for its freedom. *"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that 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 firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved."

A new world and a new people are coming! The Holy Spirit has impregnated creation and His redeemed people with the hope of eternal life. The length of our pregnant wait is uncertain. World events and personal experiences seem to call its coming into question. We groan with longing to see Jesus, to be raised from death to eternal life with all other believers from earth and heaven, to live with minds and bodies that allow us to reflect the glory of God our Creator without failure, and so does creation itself! The stars sing, the mountains murmur, and the oceans thunder; trees sway, lions roar, and we all pray: "Thy kingdom come!" And come, God's kingdom will, in glory beyond our imagining. For now though let the vision of Isaiah deepen your longing:

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.*

*The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.*

*They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)*

And now, let all of God's people say, "Amen!"