

Sunday 19th July. Trinity 7. Benefice Holy Communion,
Ampleforth.
Groaning Toward Glory. Romans 8:12-25

We all know what it feels like to wait for something to be made right. Sometimes it is personal: an unanswered prayer, a tired body, a strained relationship, a grief that still aches. At other times it is wider than our own lives. We look at the brokenness of the world, the suffering of creation, the injustice, decay, and uncertainty, and we see that things are not as they should be.

That is the tension Paul addresses in our Epistle. He does not ask believers to pretend suffering is unreal or to deny the groaning of the world. Instead, he shows us how to live faithfully in the middle of it. He says we are not slaves to fear or debtors to the flesh (our selfish natures), but we are children of God, led by the Holy Spirit, adopted into the Father's family, and made heirs with Christ.

In Rome, adopting a child meant that a child was freely chosen by the parents, *desired* by the parents. That child would become a permanent part of the family, and the parents couldn't disown a child they adopted. The adopted child received a new identity, and any prior commitments, responsibilities and debts were erased as new rights and responsibilities were taken on. Also, in ancient Rome, the concept of inheritance was also part of life, not something that began at death. Being adopted made someone an heir to their father, giving the child joint sharers in all his possessions and fully united to him.

St Paul explains that rather than diminishing the beautiful reality of being children of God through creation,

becoming heirs essentially doubles up on the power and significance of God's fatherhood to a new personal and intimate level as one would call a father, "Daddy!", as Jesus Himself did. St Paul declares that we are fully desired, fully loved; that we have taken on a new identity through Jesus; that we were created for Heaven, but even now, are heirs to God, "co-heirs with Christ".

But the question remains; how do we live when life is painful, the world is weary, and the promise is not yet fully seen? Paul leads us from the old life, into the adopted life we now share, and toward the glory for which all creation waits. He begins, "Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh." The old life no longer has a rightful claim over us. The flesh is life turned away from God: ruled by sin, fear, selfishness, and unbelief. But because of the Spirit, we are no longer bound to that old master. In Christ, we are free to live as people who belong to God.

But Paul does not leave us only with what we have been freed from. He turns to what we have been brought into. "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." The Spirit does not lead us back into fear or make us anxious slaves, wondering whether God will accept us. The Spirit bears witness that we are beloved children. Paul says we have received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba, Father." The holy and sovereign God is also the Father who welcomes His children. We come not as strangers earning a place in the house, but as sons and daughters brought home by grace. So, we do not obey in order to become loved; we obey because we already are loved.

Yet being God's children does not mean we are spared every sorrow. Paul says we share in Christ's sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory. The Christian life is not a promise of ease. It is a promise that suffering will not have the last word. Then Paul gives one of Scripture's great statements of hope: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." He does not say pain is small or easy. He says the glory to come is so great that every sorrow will finally be seen in the light of God's redemption.

Christian hope does not minimise hardship; it puts hardship in perspective. It says, "This is painful, but it is not final. This is heavy, but it is not ultimate. Glory is coming." And Paul's vision is larger than our individual lives. He widens the lens to the suffering of the whole creation. Creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. The world itself is pictured as longing and straining forward for the day when God's redeeming work will be fully displayed.

The brokenness we see is not proof that God has abandoned His creation. It is a sign that creation is longing for redemption. The world is groaning, but it is groaning toward glory. One day, the God who raised Jesus from the dead will renew all things. The curse will not have the final word; God's new creation will.

Finally, Paul brings the focus back to us: we ourselves groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies. We already belong to the Father, but we have not yet experienced the fullness of what that adoption will mean. Hope is not wishful thinking; it is faith looking

forward to what God has promised. We groan as children waiting for home, as heirs waiting for inheritance, as believers waiting for resurrection. Our present ache is real, but it is held within a greater promise: glory is coming.

Thanks be to God. Amen.