



**Westminster Presbyterian Church**  
Eugene, Oregon  
“At Home” Worship  
**Trinity Sunday: July 19, 2020**

*Gathering Around God’s Word*

*If you are worshipping with another family member or with children, you are invited to have different voices share and read the various parts of the service. You can also call/FaceTime someone to worship together.*

*(If you have a prayer request you would like added to the At-Home Worship service, please email Brooke office@wpceugene.org)*

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Search me O God and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.

**God guides us every moment of every day.**

Lead us O God in your way.

**Let your light shine within us and among us.**

**OPENING HYMN**

*Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*

#82

**CALL TO CONFESSION**

Sisters and brothers, all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. We did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but we have received a spirit of adoption. Let us then confess our sin with the freedom of children who know how deeply they are loved.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Merciful God, your creatures cry, creation groans, but we turn away. We are quick to excuse ourselves from responsibility; we are young; we are old; we are tired; we are busy. It is hard to imagine that we might make a difference. Loving God, make us clean. Restore our imaginations and our hearts. Let your courage be in us so that we may reach out to a creation that waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. Amen.**

**DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS**

Sisters and brothers, hear the word of Lord. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God says you are my own; you are forgiven.

## *The Word*

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God, source of all light, by your Word you give light to the soul. Pour out upon us the spirit of wisdom and understanding that, being taught by you in Holy Scripture, our hearts and minds may be opened to know the things that pertain to life and holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

*Old Testament Reading: Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24*

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night’, even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

*New Testament Reading: Romans 8:12-25*

So then, brothers and sisters, 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 children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

### SERMON

*“Eager Longing”*

Rev. David Ukropina

For Marta and for me, last week’s worship service was an emotional one. It was the first time we’ve had in-person worship at Westminster for just over four months. Our last in-person service was a Wednesday Lenten service on March 11, and last Sunday was July 12, so it was just a day over four months ago.

As we gathered last Sunday, we thought about all those who were watching with us, and this week, it once again feels very emotional to be in this sanctuary, even though it’s mostly empty. This moment has me thinking about how this place is a special, sacred space, built by many hands and much effort over many years. It has been through the effort and work and faithfulness of many faithful saints, and through the grace of God, that this space has been sanctified.

When we were in seminary, one of the roles we heard about for ministers was that in a way, we

represent God to the people, and we represent the people to God, and as I stand here today, I am reminded of that role. Those of you watching this video are not physically here, and one of our roles is to represent you in this holy place.

Like all of you, we all had hoped it wouldn't be so long and wouldn't continue to be so long apart from each other. We all long for an end to the pandemic for so many reasons. We long for an end to the suffering and death, an end to the fear and worry, an end to worrying about businesses and livelihoods, and to worrying about our children and school in the fall.

Of course, these worries never truly end, even with the eventual end to the pandemic. These things will always be with us in one way or another. You hear people talk about a "new normal", but ambiguity and waiting are just realities of our lives, whether it's during a pandemic or any other time.

And that brings us to our passage today from Paul's letter to the Romans, the eighth chapter. Two weeks ago, I preached from Romans chapter seven, where Paul talks about being caught in the struggle between wanting to do what's right but not being able to do it completely. This week, some of that theme continues as Paul discusses both creation and we ourselves caught between waiting and longing for redemption, but not being there yet.

Theologians have sometimes referred to this situation we find ourselves living in as "the already and the not yet". God and God's kingdom have already broken into our lives and into creation through the person of Jesus Christ, in his life, death and resurrection, and through Jesus, God has bridged the gulf of estrangement between us.

And yet at the same time, God's kingdom and God's reign are not yet fully here. Sin and separation from God are still very evident in our world, and we can see that in so many different ways. Still, God is working in our lives and in our world towards redeeming creation, and that reality of "the already and the not yet" is where we find ourselves living.

Longing for an end to this pandemic is not the only thing we find ourselves longing and waiting for. Many of us have anticipated a surgery where we have longed for relief from our pain. Some have longed for the time they can graduate and move on to some other part of life, or they have longed for a new job offer. Many people long for better health, or currently just long for a time they can hug their grandchildren without wearing a hazmat suit.

In the midst of this waiting and longing, the people have always suffered. The people of Paul's time, and the Roman congregation, knew all about suffering and persecution. We today are very aware of all the things we suffer through. Any congregation has people who have suffered all kinds of abuse, illness, loneliness and despair.

And yet suffering does not negate the promises and the glory of the resurrection. Writer and theologian Tom Wright tells us that "the path to glory... lies along the road of suffering." That was true in Jesus life, and it is true in ours as well.

In Romans Paul compares our situation to a woman in labor pains when he writes, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (verse 22).

Paul is saying that we are like a woman in labor who cannot wait for the pain to be over, but also cannot wait to meet the long-awaited child about to be born. Like in most human experience, suffering and hope are not contradictory, but inseparable and woven together.

In the midst of all these things, Paul calls us to hope, and that our hope is rooted in things we cannot see. As we look around the world, whatever this world is, it's not the kingdom. Even without a pandemic, the world is violent, painful and full of suffering and injustice. That is how it has always been and, this side of heaven, always will be.

And having hope is an interesting thing. It does not always make things easier. The one who hopes also hurts. The one who has hope has a restless heart, because of living through the contrast of what we hope for against the way things actually are, which always falls short of what we hope for.

But at the same time, hope can also lift us up, and give us the courage to endure the suffering. Its like that old line about how Christians are not so much isolated from the suffering of the world, but are insulated from it, by the love and grace given to us by God through Jesus Christ.

And hope can also feed our imagination and inspiration to actually try to work at changing things and making them better. That process of making things better is not brought to perfect completion in our lives, but we are invited by God to help in the process of bringing about God's kingdom on earth.

In the meantime, we wait, living in both the already and the not yet, watching and waiting in earnest hope for the eventual return of God's son. And while we do, our knowledge of the return of Christ can inform our lives in the here and now to live with patience and with eagerness for redemption.

Some of you know that we recently got a labradoodle puppy named Charlie. One of the things I've noticed is how eagerly he will await certain kinds of food. If we so much as touch a jar of peanut butter, Charlie instantly appears at our feet with a look of eager anticipation. I don't remember where I heard this, but someone once said that as Christians, we should watch for the return of Christ the way a dog watches a plate of meat being passed around the dinner table.

If we fail to see the redemption of God that is coming, then we lose heart. But if we hope for what we don't yet see, we wait with eager patience. Impatience is something that almost defines our era, and everyone wants everything faster and easier. Yet as Christians, we are called to work against the culture and wait with longing, patience and eagerness.

As all of us have been living through this pandemic, we've all had different reactions and different journeys, but I sense that all of us have dealt with enormous fatigue and have all gone through something like stages of grief. There have been points early on when we thought we would hunker down and the threat would gradually diminish, only to find threats coming back, whether locally or nationally.

And in the midst of such a time, it can be hard to hear the words of Paul telling us to wait with eager anticipation. If anything, we are not feeling eager so much as fatigued. And apart from a pandemic, even in normal times we are people who become very experienced at tempering our hopes and expectations.

I don't know about you, but when I go to see a movie, I will often lower my hopes and expectations so that I have more of a chance of actually enjoying the movie. I think we do this a lot in life too. We adults are especially good at not getting our hopes up so that we avoid disappointment.

Yet in this text and elsewhere, Paul encourages us to abandon our expectation management when it comes to the promise of glory from God. He wants us to let ourselves get carried away with the hope for the future of God's kingdom on earth. Romans chapter eight gives us a vision of a world redeemed, where creation is free from its bondage to decay.

If I had to encourage you to do just one thing during this pandemic, within the context of this sermon, it would be to encourage you to pay attention to how you are growing through all of this. We are all fatigued, we are all anxious to some degree, but how are we growing? How are we changing?

Are we growing into cynicism, anxiety or depression? Or are we persevering in hope, all the while growing with persistence, endurance and patience. In the process, God is the one helping us. We need to see the way that God helps our faith grow by hoping for the future, not in some Pollyanna, pie-in-the-sky kind of way, but with real concrete hope.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ really happened in history. The resurrection really happened, and the second coming and establishment of God's kingdom will really happen, in history. As it's been said before, I don't know what the future holds, but I know the one who holds the future.

In the meantime, we can pay attention to how we are being shaped during a pandemic. The great poet John Keats once described this world as a "vale of soul making". Academics have argued about what Keats meant by this, but I've always taken it to mean that as we travel through the suffering of this world, our souls are growing towards the way God wants us to be.

That doesn't mean God makes pandemics or other awful things just to force us to grow. Those awful things simply happen, but God helps us in the middle of them to grow, to stretch, to persevere and to hope, all the time growing closer to being those who God has created us to be. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH from A Brief Statement of Faith

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and renewer of life. The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church. The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the church. In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

*Responding to God's Word*

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER**

God is the one who answers prayer and walks with us in times of celebration and grief, for the Holy One has purpose more glorious than we can imagine. Therefore, let us offer our prayers and give thanks to the One who comforts, restores, and heals...

Let us pray for all leaders and people of the world. You have created one human family to live in peace. Give us the wisdom to order our world that all may find shelter and love...

Let us pray for your church. You have given us the gift of Christ, that your church may be faithful, loving and wise. Give us strength to follow your Son until all are reconciled by his grace and love...

Let us pray for those who are sick or who suffer. You have made us for a noble purpose, to love and care for one another. Give us the compassion to love our neighbor...

Let us pray for creation. Your faithfulness is revealed in the nature of creation. Rid us of apathy and greed that injures its health, for you have bound your creation together for the blessing of all...

Let us remember those who have died. You call us into communion in worship to glorify you. Make us one with the saints, who have found their eternal rest in you. We pray in Christ's name, who taught us to pray...

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.**

*Sending of God's Word*

CLOSING HYMN

*A Mighty Fortress is Our God*

#275

BENEDICTION

And now may the Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other. -Genesis, 31:49