

**Creation Restored: A Reason for both Hope and Hard Work**  
**Romans 8                      Tim Dickau                      May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

**Have you ever been lost?**

I want to tell you about a time I got lost. When we had been married a year, Mary and I went with my parents on a trip to Florida where Mary's aunt and uncle lived. We landed in Fort Lauderdale, rented a car and started driving to the city where they lived. After driving from the airport for a ways, we had to make a decision which off ramp to take. I should add that this was long before google maps. All we had were paper maps and not a very detailed one at that. Very soon, we came to a decision point. Would we take off ramp A or B? Part of the problem is that we weren't sure where we were already by the time we got to the decision point. Nevertheless, my Dad and I, who were in the front seats, thought we should take off ramp A. Mary and my mom thought that the off- ramp B. We took off ramp A. While there were some hints along the way that suggested that Mary and my mom were right – like signs pointing in the other direction – but that did not deter my dad and I from the resolve that we were going the right way. We would not be shaken. And we weren't, until when, 2 hours later we came to a town that was indeed on the wrong side of Fort Lauderdale from where we needed to get to, making our arrival late and our hosts quite worried.

If you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are going, you can get really lost. It doesn't help if you are stubborn and unwilling to listen to wise voices.

**Two Foundational Questions**

During this series on creation, we have attempted to get our bearings and to answer these two important questions my dad and I failed to answer well: **#1** Where are we? And where are we going? The Biblical story along with other information we have learned about the earth speaks into these two questions.

**Where are we?** We are in God's good creation, a creation that God loves. This is not a throw away world. This is a world the creator has fashioned over billions of years and which God has recently given humans an important role to play as stewards or caretakers of creation.

**Where are we going?** Creation is headed towards restoration and fulfillment. God has come in Christ to redeem and restore creation, including us. Jesus' resurrection is a sign pointing towards a destination and end goal of restoration. God is not going to abandon the creation or give up on this goal. God is committed to leading creation itself through death to restoration in the same way that he resurrected and restored Jesus' body. That is our end hope.

How we answer these two questions matters. One of the reasons that we have so many ethical conflicts in our society is that there is much disagreement around these two questions. As just one example, consider how our answers to these questions impact how we treat the planet. Are we living in a throwaway world that is destined for destruction? If so, it becomes easier to justify exploiting the planet for our own gain. Will the world basically unfold as it will no matter what humans do? Then why worry about human caused pollution, greenhouse gas emissions or pesticide use. Or conversely is the future of the world almost entirely dependent up on us as humans? That has led many to despair since we don't have a great track record as humans. You can see that how we answer these questions will impact how we tread in the world. How we answer these two questions can lead to very different ways of living.

**Romans 8: A Stunning view of God and Salvation**

Today, I want to look at a chapter in the bible that addresses these two questions. Romans 8 offers a map of where we are and where we are going, one that also helps us find our place and role in the unfolding story of creation.

I love Romans 8. If I were stranded on a remote deserted island without internet and could take only 5 chapters from the Bible with me, this would definitely be one of my top five. The primary theme of Romans 8 is God's complete and utter commitment to restoration – to restoring both humans and the rest of creation.

Let's look at this chapter. The chapter can be nicely divided into three parts. In the first part of this chapter in verses 1-17, Paul discusses how God is making *humans* new. Jake spoke last week that God intends to restore us as embodied creatures. Here Paul describes *how* that is happening here. He tells us that in the Messiah Jesus, specifically in his death on a cross, God has condemned sin and evil – all those powers that destroy life and keep us from flourishing – powers that we are so familiar with. Jesus' resurrection is the sign that God has defeated these powers, and that creation has been re-launched. In order to seed this new creation throughout the world, God gives his Spirit to those who receive him in order to empower them to become God-imagining creatures. Once you step into life with Christ and receive the Spirit, Paul argues, you are freed to pursue a different kind of life, one that is obedient to God. Not that we always do, far from it, but freedom is there for the taking, and the spirit keeps calling, prodding, leading us towards this goal of true humanity.

That's the first half of this passage then: God is making humans new, restoring us. But as we move to the second part of the chapter, this picture of restoration grows much wider to include the entire world. We're just getting started here. There's more to come.

Before Paul gets to that bigger picture, he has a warning for humans in verse 15. *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption as sons and daughters.* The back story here behind Paul's words is the story of the Exodus. When God delivered his people from Egypt, they were always tempted while in the wilderness to go back to their oppressors, both because of fear and stubbornness. It's a warning for us. Don't let fears or stubbornness drive you back into ways of living that lead to slavery and death. My dad's and my stubbornness in our Florida trip is part of a long trend in human behavior. These fears and stubbornness are going to be something we need to confront if we are going to take up our rightful role in the story of God's world.

### **The Birth of a Renewed World**

In the second part of this chapter, the part read for us, Paul picks up the metaphor of giving birth to describe God's work of restoration. We're awaiting a few birth stories ourselves in the next couple weeks. But this is not about a single baby girl or boy being born: it is about the re-birthing of the entire creation. Like any birth, there is a whole lot of groaning in this process. Mary's done a lot of groaning living with my humor for 34 years but nothing like when she delivered Thomas. Over 24 hours of deep groaning. Births and groaning usually go together. #2 Paul names three groaning in this birth process.

- A. The whole creation groans
- B. We ourselves groan
- C. The Spirit groans with us.

In this birthing story, Paul puts the story of God's action in the world on a big screen and says look: Conception has taken place - the new world has begun in Christ's resurrection, humanity is being renewed. But this renewed world and renewed us doesn't come easily; there are plenty of labor pains. There is plenty of suffering and groaning before new creation arrives in full.

Let's look at these three groanings.

- A. First, the whole creation groans (verses 17-22)

Paul writes that the creation waits for the children of God to be revealed. In other words, creation is groaning as it waits on tip-toe for the children of God to be revealed. The idea here is that creation itself has gotten off track, just like humans, in part because of human's bad choices. The hope is that as humans get their act together, when humans take up their rightful vocation as stewards and caretakers of creation and culture, then the world itself will itself experience a liberation of sorts. That's part of the human vocation that Jesus' victory over sin restores.

But, the world and creation aren't going to get sorted out without suffering; there will be plenty of labor pains along the way.

B. For us as humans too. Verse. 23. "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our bodies."

One thing that is hard to be convinced of in a culture of "on demand" is that our lives will remain incomplete, not fully redeemed until the End. Physically, emotionally, vocationally, mentally, in every way, we are not yet the kind of people we hope to be, or that God will make us until we ourselves go through death to resurrection. We get frustrated, we feel dissatisfied, we long for more. Some experience grinding poverty and oppression. We groan. We are headed towards a final restoration, but we aren't there yet.

C. What is surprising is that Spirit groans in us too. The Spirit groans with us (verses 26-27). "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

The image Paul offers of the Spirit is of a mid-wife. The Spirit groans with us like a midwife or a doula. She's like our resident doula, Ute Warkentin who has helped deliver many babies in our church. The Spirit holds our hands, she hears our groans, she even gives us words and intercedes for us when we can't find the words to pray or say. This is a God who we can turn to in trouble. Are you doing that? Have you considered lately that the Spirit shares your suffering.

Romans 8 offers this clarifying map of God's restoring work in the world. Through Jesus' death, God has overcome the powers that destroy life. Jesus' resurrection is the sign of that victory over evil and death. The Spirit is now at work implementing that restoring work, first in us as humans and then through is within the creation itself. Though there will be much groaning and suffering in the emergence of new life out of death now, one day God will take the entire creation through death to resurrection, completing the renewal of all things. This is where creation is headed.

### **Taking up our Renewed Vocation**

So if our role in this journey towards the restoration of all creation is to be renewed as God's image bearers to bring God's way of being into all aspects of life, how do we take up this vocation today? The answer to that question is a very wide list indeed including the renewal of every area of life and culture from health care to business to industry to labor relations to the arts to architecture to family to government to local communities. This morning, I want to focus upon one particular area of restoration. It is this one: As stewards of creation, we have a responsibility to respond more seriously to human induced climate change. This is part of our vocation in a world where humans have been the primary cause of global warming.

Last night, Katharine Hayhoe was speaking at an event in Langley. Katharine is a climate scientist. What makes her interesting to me is that she hails from the heart of oil country, Texas, and that she comes out of a conservative Christian background and context. Not what you'd think of a breeding ground for a climatologist.

She is however very knowledgeable and a very good communicator. I've got a little clip from a TED talk that I thought was worth watching because she gives a clear description of why global warming is largely human caused.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtrYNGs9oRM&t=114s> 10:20 – 13:23

The science is clear. The problem is that many of us make our decisions about climate change upon say just the last 10 years of data, or the current weather, or even our current experience. Here's an interesting experiment. A number of people were put into two rooms, one 24 degrees Celsius, one 20 degrees Celsius, and then asked if global warming was real. 81% of the people in the hot room said yes; 22% of the people in the room temperature said no.

Which is one reason many people have shifted from talking primarily about the reality of human induced climate change to talking about the impacts of human induced climate change. And these impacts are real. One more short video clip, which probably fulfills my video quota for the year - this time from the National Geographic's concise description of the impacts of climate change.

<https://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/101-videos/climate-101-causes-and-effects?source=relatedvideo> 1:10-the end. Pope Francis has focused on how climate change has especially impacted the poor who rely on agriculture, fishing and forestry.

#### **What can we do as a church? 4 actions**

1. Open up the conversation. Many conversations have started to take place and we as pastors want to encourage and widen those conversations. A great way to open up that conversation would be to read the book about to be published that was written by our own Eduardo Sasso. Eduardo wrote the book in Montreal and we are trying to get him back here for a book launch this Fall. His book is titled "Sex, Christianity and a climate of Change". If that doesn't get your interest.... Maybe our next book for our reading group.

One of the reasons we need more conversation is because we have people trying to work out how to mitigate harm around climate change in many differing contexts, jobs and industries. And we need to learn about the challenges each other face without first prescribing how they should work it out. Plus, as a church, we have already have a strong common base to build on. If you've been here more than a few weeks, you are likely already very familiar with theological framework that views creation as a gift of God to be given gratitude for and to be attended to with care and consideration. Let's hold onto that common framework when we come to places we disagree, which is often around differing perspectives about the best ways to mitigate harm or the timing for transitions to alternative energies. These conversations can quickly become as heated as the atmosphere around us. One way to think about how to go about this conversation is by asking how we can take what we have learned from other difficult conversations on other difficult issues and take those same practices into this conversation – practices like listening, being open to other views, continuing to move towards people we disagree with, being open to change. These are fruits of a Spirit-filled conversation. Let's not let unease stop us from having

the conversation and from working towards a response. I think we can move towards some creative collective responses as a church.

2. A second response is to learn from each other. There are people in our church who are learning how to go about their lives in ways to reduce carbon use. Or people like Mark who work with alternative energy technologies about how we can shift to alternative energy sources.

3. A third response is to creatively resist those public decisions that contribute to global warming; and to creatively work to both reduce harm and embrace sustainable forms of living. For example, Phil and Emma, who lived here for 6 months and who were themselves quite impacted by their time here and at Arocha, have been working in the area of regenerative design. Regenerative design is processes that restore, renew or revitalize their own sources of energy and materials, creating sustainable systems that integrate the needs of society with the integrity of nature. Phil is working on this in how he designs buildings. This is just one of many examples where people are looking for creative gains around alternative energies.

At first, many leaders and politicians wanted to just try to adapt to climate change. Don't worry about stopping it, just worry about adapting to it. Less painful. More palatable politically. But now many leaders and politicians are talking about mitigating the harm. World is waking up to the urgency, but are we waking up fast enough? Here's what one of my colleagues wrote in a local newspaper a month or so ago.

"I am convinced that 40 years from now, the next generation--our kids and grandkids--are almost certainly going to be asking: What was wrong with our parents? How could they have done so little, and been so willfully blind?"

You see, there never, ever, has been a global issue on which the scientific community has been so absolutely united. It is impossible for us even to imagine, let alone calculate, the damaging impact our use of fossil fuels is going to have upon future generations. I believe our kids are going to have a hard time forgiving us for our selfishness and our refusal to face up to the evidence. And so, I believe we Christians also have the moral obligation to both speak up and to act." Tim Kuepfer

4. Help to develop more local economies where possible. This response not only mitigates carbon consumption but it helps to build more just and sustainable cultures.

Catholic theologian William Cavanaugh in his book called "consuming desire" writes this words: "*From a Christian point of view, the churches should take an active role in fostering economic practices that lead towards the true ends of creation. This requires promoting economic practices that maintain close connections among capital, labour and communities, so that real communal discernment of good can take place. Those are the spaces in which true freedom can flourish*" (p. 32).

What he's asking for is to bring our economic activity closer to home. Those of us who live in this neighborhood have opportunities to know the people who make and sell us our many of our goods. Kurtis started a buying group from a local farm producer. These are all ways we can both reduce carbon consumption and restore power and decision making back into our own hands.

How do we work this out on the ground? Variety of ways, one is protest

### **Conclusion: A Renewed Image of the Faithful God**

These are big issues. It's easy to fall into despair in the face of them. How many of you find yourselves falling into despair around climate change? I want to come back to Romans 8 in conclusion. A final response we can make is to recognize and trust the God who is fully committed to restoring us and the creation.

One of the reasons this chapter is so stunning is because the image of God that emerges here is so much different and so much more than we often imagine. This is not a God who is uninvolved in our plight or unconcerned with our groaning. The God Paul describes here, the God whom we meet in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the God who we experience in the Spirit who shares our suffering and groans, is the God whom Paul describes as being fully “for” us. This is a God who gets his hands dirty and shares our plight. This is a God who does what is needed to overcome the forces in our world that make us afraid, becoming human and giving his life. Paul asks if anything – whether it’s troubles, hardship, famine, powers – can anything separate us from the love of this God. His answer:

“I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” That’s as good a reason as any to resist our fears and stubbornness, and to keep acting in hope for the good of God’s creation.