

April 27, 2008  
Isaiah 65:17-25  
Romans 8:18-25

From Groaning to Glory

It was hard to see how anyone could do such a thing. That dog in the street was scratched up from head to toe. Its ribs were sticking out, and its backbone. It was walking slowly with its head down, not paying any attention to all the cars whizzing by him. Someone must have lost him or turned him loose. I was in Louisville with my sister and my mom. And we had gone to visit a church near the West End where my sister was going to work. It was a pretty church in a not so pretty neighborhood with a not so pretty dog wandering past. The poor thing. How did this happen? Who would do something like that? What kind of world is this? What kind of world? Well, just read the paper. Just look around and listen. Every day it seems like there's a new story about kennels where animals are packed into cages with no food or water. Or about horses left to starve outside. Videos of people beating their pets. On a nice spring day, it's not the first thing on our minds. The trees are blooming, birds are singing, the Derby is coming. Creation seems so happy. But sooner or later we notice. Something isn't quite right. The earth is

straining. Life is struggling. People, animals, living things are hurting.

As the apostle Paul says, creation is groaning.

It's difficult not to notice that. Especially since all this month, we've talked about creation being good, and being blessing by God. And we look around and see that it's not. We've talked about people created in the image of God to be God's loving representatives in the world. And we can see how we aren't. It's hard not to notice that something isn't right. Creation is groaning. And reading in God's word about how creation should be, how God made it to be has made the groaning louder. It's like we can't go anywhere without thinking about God's earth around us. I can't go anywhere without thinking: Where is the recycling bin? Is there phosphorus in my bathroom cleaner that will end up in the ocean? Should I buy my lima tortilla chips in bulk to save on packaging? Where the heck did I put my cloth shopping bags this time? And can I get out of my car and throw the cigarette butt back inside that car window before the light turns green? I've thought a lot more about all those things. And I know I should have thought about them before. Because the Word of God has made things obvious in our consuming,

me-me-me world. This isn't how things are supposed to be. And creation is groaning.

The earth is straining. Life is struggling. And it's all starting to hit home now that we are groaning over the prices at the pump and the grocery store. We used to groan about finding the right kind of jeans or fuss about what Lunchable to get the kids while creation was groaning. But now we see something isn't right. There are water shortages and food riots going on in the world. People are suffering. The earth is suffering. Everyone is paying more and getting less and we see the waste and the abuse. Now we hear creation groaning.

But the children of God hear it. They see the strain. They are moved by the thought that something needs to change. Paul writes that creation is groaning. And the children of God are groaning on the inside waiting for redemption. Because they know something is not right in the world. All of God's children, born of grace and love know there is something not graceful or loving about the world. If you've come to the Sunday school classes this month then you've seen a glimpse of it. In the Planet Earth series we've seen beautiful scenery. Amazing animals. So much

wonderful life in creation. But every week there is still a little groaning. Every time there's that chase scene where the baby caribou is about to get it. Or the mountain goat is about to get eaten. Every week, every thing gets really tense in that back room. And there are oh nos and some aw's. And some people just can't even watch. And we all wait. And we hope the baby gets away. And sometimes they do. But sometimes, (oh no!) and it just makes creation feel all wrong. Something doesn't seem right. We know wolves and sharks have to survive. We know bears and eagles have to eat. That's just the way it is. It's not pretty. It's not nice. But that's how it goes. That's the law of nature. That's life. Suffering and fear and pain are just part of it. The strong survive and the weak don't. The world goes on. And we hear creation groaning and we are groaning because we know that life is more than survival; it's more than eat or be eaten. God made creation to be good, all of it. As the children of God, that's the kind of life we believe God created.

Maybe it was something like that that made me go back outside the church in Louisville and look for the dog on the streets. I found the number for animal control and called them and I walked a few blocks

trying to find the dog again. As I came back to toward the church empty handed, I saw a lady from the drug store next door I hadn't even noticed bringing out food and water to the dog. From the looks of him, he had been in some fights. A lot of them. His legs were all scratched. His ear was torn. And ate the food, he could hardly sit down from all the infection in his legs. But he didn't make any noise. No barking, no growling. Nothing. He just slowly ate. "They probably used him to fight other dogs," said the drug store cashier. She was outside smoking a cigarette and wiping tears off her face. "How could people do things like that to an animal?"

The children of God see what's happening to creation and ask, how could this be? How could this happen in a world that should be good? How could there be suffering? How could there be abuse and neglect and pain? How could this whole world just come down to predator and prey and victim? The world is hurting. I am hurting. Something isn't right. All of creation down here is groaning. And how could the Creator we know let this be? How could love and grace be in charge when there is so much going wrong?

Paul knows things are going wrong. Paul knows there is suffering. The world is hurting. Creation is groaning. Everywhere there is frustration and angry and pain. And we want it to stop. We want things to be different. No more hurting animals and suffering children. No more sickness or disease or piles of pills. No more fear of violence or fear of going hungry or fear of losing our jobs or fear of losing the ones we love. No more. All of creation is groaning and Paul and the children of God know that God made life to be better than that.

And he reminds us that that's what God wants too. There is suffering, yes. And hurt. And pain. But the glory of God is about to be revealed in the world. The hope and healing and forgiveness of God in Jesus is about to be revealed here. God said no to hunger by feeding the five thousand. God said no to suffering on the cross. God said no to death at the empty tomb. God said no to giving up on creation and God said yes to life on Easter morning. Taking all our hurt, all our sin, all our 'should haves could haves' that hold us down and God said yes to that good good creation. Yes, life is worth it. All of it.

When the animal control officer showed up, the dog was leaning against a car in the shade. He was too tired to move. Hurting too much to lay down. The officer looked the dog over. She shook her head, “These animals are bred to fight. He’s full of sores and we’ll get him cleaned up, but he won’t ever be able to be around people or other dogs. He will just fight them.” An African American woman with grey hair had come over. “It’s a real shame,” she said, “he could have been a good dog.” The officer loaded up the dog and got him situated. Those of us standing there knew they were going to have to put him down. I started to cry with the cashier. And not just a little, but a lot. It was heart breaking. It wasn’t fair. The dog should have had a better life. The officer asked if I was OK. A man in a stained Tshirt standing there said, “They should do the same thing to the people that did that to the dog.” But that didn’t make me feel any better. Creation was groaning so loudly and we were groaning with it. And the truck drove off with that hurting dog. It wasn’t right. The world wasn’t good. Something was terribly wrong. But as my sister and my mom collected ourselves to go, we remembered. As you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me, someone said.

And remember the Samaritan who saw the one beaten and was moved with pity. And where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there. And the creation waits with eager longing for the children of God to be revealed, Paul says. And even in the suffering, the Spirit moves us, strangers even, to reveal a little healing, a little grace, a little hope for a better life.

Creation is groaning. But the children of God are being revealed. The people who know love and hope, who know resurrection and starting over. The people who know that things can be different. The world isn't just what we see. It's about the hope that God has given us to reveal. God has made creation good and is making it good again. And we won't have to be afraid of sickness or pain or cruelty. Life will be lived to the full as Isaiah says up on that mountain. And if we look carefully, we just might see it happening now. The wolf laying down with the lamb. The lion and the ox eating together. The weak and the strong sharing grace. The groaning turning into glory. God the creator has said yes to all of creation in the coming kingdom. And it is being revealed in every small act of kindness. In every action of grace and forgiveness. Things don't

have to be the same. Because redemption is here. God's grace is here and it is happening now as the children of God start acting and believing in the better life God has made. It's good news. For all of creation.