7-19-20, THW

Sermon on Romans 8:12—25

1. Introduction
2. Paul’s letter, probably written around the year 55, to the church in Rome
3. A church with both Jewish and Gentile believers
4. A church grappling with what it meant to be the Body of Christ
5. A church under the carefully watching eye of the empire
6. Although it is written to the members of the church, with the goal of helping them to understand how to function as a Christian community, this letter is at the same time a theological treatise which is rich with Paul’s teaching.
7. Immediately preceding this passage, Paul has been writing about the life that we have in the Spirit if Christ dwells within us.
8. Prayer
9. The text
10. (v. 12 & 13) **Our obligation** Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. [For Paul, “the flesh” refers to human selfishness and selfish desires.]
11. (v. 13a) For, if you live according to the flesh, you will die. [This is a reference to a spiritual death.]
12. (v. 13b) But, if by the Spirit [Note that we do not accomplish this by ourselves.] you put to death the misdeeds of the body [or ”the flesh”] you will live.
13. (v. 14—17) **Our adoption** For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.
14. (v. 15a) The Spirit you received did not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again;
15. (v. 15b) Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship
16. (v. 15c) And, by him, we cry, “Abba, Father.” [This is a term of love and of intimacy. Can you imagine that our relationship, through the Holy Spirit, is one in which we call the Creator and Sustainer of the universe by this term of love?]
17. (v. 16 & 17) The Spirit himself [not “itself”; the Spirit is a person, not a thing.] testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.
18. (v. 17a) Now, if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ,
19. (v. v.17b) If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
20. (v. 18—21) **Creation** I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.
21. (v. 19) For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.
22. (v. 20) For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,
23. (v. 20a) in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay
24. (v. 20b) and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. [A new, cosmic thing is happening, and we are in the midst of it!]
25. (v. 22—25) **Birthing a new thing** We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.
26. (v. 23) Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.
27. (v. 24 & 25) For in this hope [Remember, that we could substitute the word “assurance” for hope.] we were saved.
28. (v. 24) But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?
29. (v. 25) But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.
30. What will we take away from this text this morning?

First, we need to check our priorities. Do we come first, or does our relationship with God come first? Does our physical and emotional comfort come first, or does our devotion to God? These are real, legitimate questions which Paul raises.

A part of the answer isn’t good news for us. We know, if we look seriously at ourselves that our natural inclination is to choose for our own comfort. Fortunately, there is good news for us. In verse 13 we read that, “…if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.” We are not alone. God’s Holy Spirit dwells within each of us, nudging us, comforting us, encouraging us and leading us to be more God-centered and less self-centered. God is not neutral in this struggle.

The next thing I take from this passage is more good news for us, and it has to do with our relationship with God. I think that secretly we kind of think of God as the CEO of a multi-cosmos corporation and we’re toiling away in some cubicle in one of the corporate buildings. We are dependent upon God, but we doubt how much we mean in the big scheme of things. And this is completely wrong.

Paul says that, by the Holy Spirit, we are received by God as God’s children. Not as nameless, faceless workers droning away at our jobs and our vocations, but as beloved children. Paul goes on to say that, again by the Holy Spirit, we call out to God with the word “Abba.” This beautiful Arabic word, still in regular use in Arabic today, could perhaps be best translated as “Daddy” or as “Papa.” This is the kind of relationship we have with God. It is a relationship of love and intimacy. This is who we are in God’s view. And what could be more beautiful than that?

Next, Paul talks about sufferings in the life of a Christ-follower. He seems to suggest that this is an expected part of our journey. And he says that, as real as these sufferings may be, they don’t even begin to compare to the glory and the beauty that will be revealed. And he goes farther, saying that we will be right in the midst of this glory and beauty.

Paul then tells us that all creation is groaning in anticipation of the beautiful, glorious thing that God is doing, and that we too are groaning as we anticipate the wonder of seeing for ourselves what adoption by God means for us. In the meantime, we wait confidently, knowing that our time will come and all will be revealed in its glory and beauty.

So, then, what does it all mean for today? Well, we find ourselves in this strange environment that 2020 has been so far. We can’t worship together without risking the health and safety of some of our members. We can’t even meet in the same room as members of committees and teams.

We also don’t know yet who our next pastor will be. I’m confident that God is right now preparing some sister or brother for this call which that person is currently unaware of. But when will it happen? Who will it be? What will he or she be like? What kind of personality does she or he have? What kind of preaching style will that next pastor bring? And the questions go on and on.

There is movement on this front. The Mission Study Team has completed its work and has submitted a very good draft report to the Session. The Session is working on the draft and I’m hopeful that Session will approve a final form of the report when it meets this coming Tuesday. The report will then go to the presbytery’s Commission on Ministry and, if the report is approved as I expect it will be, we will be authorized to elect a Pastor Nominating Committee. I don’t think it’s at all unreasonable to think that a new pastor will be in place next January or February.

And what about our new sense of call to fight racism? I suspect that there’s not one of us who feels prepared at this moment to take up this challenge. And yet, I very strongly feel that God is calling us to learn, study, self-examine, pray, study, and move in the direction of standing side by side with our brothers and sisters of color in opposition to those systems which are unjust and punitive.

It sounds like a lot, doesn’t it? By ourselves, it would be hopeless and filled with despair. But fortunately, we are not by ourselves. We walk the journey and we love and we serve. God has invited us to address God by the name Abba. By the Holy Spirit, God has made us beloved and precious daughters and sons. Can we accept that truth and live accordingly? Can we walk the journey God has prepared for us with courage and determination and true joy? And, as we go, can we bask in the love God has for us? May it be so. Amen