

Sermon: 8th Sunday After Pentecost/Pr. 11 - “We Wait in Hope” – Summer Preaching Series: Being Church Together

Date/Time: Sunday, July 19th 2026 – 7:45a, 10:00a **Service:** Holy Eucharist Rite I & II

You know - this week has taught me - we spend a surprising amount of our lives waiting. We wait in line.

We wait for appointments.

And we wait to hear if our cars are coming out of the repair or being totaled

We wait for the coffee to finish brewing - even though watch it, that never makes it brew faster.

Truly, some waiting is just inconvenient.

But, others bear more weight.

Like when we wait for test results.

Or for our sadness to become a little easier to carry.

Or when we wait for clarity about what’s coming next.

That kind of waiting can wear on us.

Because we don’t always know how long it’ll last.

And, we don’t know what comes next.

And sometimes we can’t tell if anything’s changing at all.

That’s where we find Paul today.

All summer, in this sermon series we’re in - *Being Church Together* - we’ve been walking through Romans.

Not because the Church in Rome had everything figured out - they didn’t.

Paul’s helping them understand what God’s done in Christ.

And what that means for the life they’re now learning to share.

Here, Paul is speaking to people who know what it is to wait.

And he doesn’t tell them that everything will work out exactly as they want.

Instead, Paul tells them that all creation is groaning.

“*We ourselves groan inwardly while we wait.*”

How honest is that??

Because sometimes faith sounds like praise.

Sometimes it sounds like thanksgiving.

Sometimes faith sounds confident, like trust.

And sometimes faith sounds like a groan too deep to shape into words.

Paul makes room for all of it.

He doesn’t try to correct the groaning. Or treat it like weakness.

He recognizes it - as part of what it means to love a world that’s not quite whole.

We groan when violence becomes daily news.

We groan when human beings are treated as problems to be solved instead of neighbors to be loved.

We groan when there never seems to be enough - enough money, enough time, enough patience, enough security - and fear tells us to hold tightly to what we have.

We groan when the Church struggles to embody the love it proclaims.

And sometimes we groan because something in our own life hurts, and we can't seem to make it better.

Paul doesn't ask us to deny any of that.

And Christian hope doesn't begin by pretending that everything is fine.

But Paul also tells us that the groaning isn't the whole story.

Creation is groaning, he says, as in labor pains.

This isn't the groaning of something simply coming to an end.

It is the groaning of something longing to be born.

Something's unfinished.

Something's still becoming.

God is still at work.

And that's where hope lives.

Not, outside uncertainty.

Not, after every question is answered.

Not, once we can finally see how everything turns out.

Hope lives here - in the waiting.

"For in hope we were saved," Paul writes - and he goes on - "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?"

If we can already see it, and hold it, measure it, and manage it, we don't need hope.

Hope begins right in that place where our control ends.

But - y'all - Christian hope isn't just being optimistic.

Optimism takes a look at the available evidence and says that things'll probably be OK.

Hope looks honestly at the evidence - all of it - and still entrusts the future to God.

Optimism says, "I think this'll turn out well."

Christian hope says, "However this turns out, God will not abandon us."

Optimism depends on circumstances.

Hope depends on the faithfulness of God.

That's why hope can exist even when it seems to make no sense.

It can exist when the world seems determined to prey on us.

It can exist at the bedside even when results seem disheartening.

It can exist when the future of the Church feels uncertain.

Hope can live there because hope is: even when we really don't know what's coming next - we do know who God is.

Merciful.

Faithful.

Present.

Still drawing creation toward freedom and life.

Now, before Paul tells us how to wait, he reminds us who we are:

"You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption."

We're children of God.

Heirs of God.

Joint heirs with Christ.

We belong to God.

And because we belong to God, we belong to one another.

This matters because anything less isolates us, and we fall back into fear.

Fear tells us that we're alone.

Fear tells us that there's not enough.

Fear tells us that someone else's well-being only comes at our expense.

Fear tells us to draw the circle smaller, guard what's ours, and prepare for the worst.

The Spirit of adoption tells another story.

The Spirit bears witness that we're not orphans left to fend for ourselves.

The Spirit tells us that we're members of a household larger than the boundaries we would draw.

The Spirit teaches us to cry, "Abba! Father!" - even before we know what else to say.

So when life is uncertain, when the Church is frustrated, and when the world feels frightening, the Body of Christ doesn't surrender to panic.

We can choose hope over panic.

Trust over fear.

Generosity over scarcity.

Not because we know exactly what will happen next, but because we know Whose we are.

And because we know that we're in this together.

This is another one of the things our liturgy teaches us week after week.

The Church doesn't just tell us to have hope.

The Church gives us practices that form us into hopeful people.
All the things we do when we gather.
Light candles, we listen for God in Scripture.
Confess the truth about ourselves, exchange Christ's peace.
Bring offerings of bread and wine to the Table.
And we pray!
None of these actions denies what's broken.
They declare a creation that's held by God - and that God isn't finished with us yet.

Think about our Prayers of the People.
Every Sunday, we pray for the Church and the world.
We pray for those who govern.
We pray for the earth.
We pray for the community.
We pray for those who suffer.
We remember those who have died.

Really - we bring the groaning of creation right into the middle of our worship.
We don't hide it outside.
We name it together.
And then, petition after petition, we say something together to collectively ascent and lift that prayer to God.

That response isn't a filler between one concern and the next.
It is a declaration of hope.
Lord, this is real and it hurts, and we don't know how to fix it.
But we believe you hear us.
We believe this wounded world remains your world.
And we believe that today's suffering - real as it is - is never the last word.

The Prayers of the People are the Church's shared hope spoken aloud.
And there'll be Sundays when some of us come into this place with hope to spare.
There'll also be Sundays when some of us have barely enough strength to sit in a pew.
There'll be times when the words come easy.
And there'll be times when we can barely get a word out.

But there's not a day that we pray alone.
The person beside us keeps responding.
The choir keeps singing.
The Church keeps praying.

And when I can't carry hope for myself, the Body of Christ carries it with me.
And that, too, is what it means to be Church together.
Sometimes I carry the hope for you - sometimes you carry it for me.
Sometimes the whole Church holds hope for someone who, for a time, can't hold it for themselves.
In the next verse after our lesson this morning - Paul says in those times the Spirit prays for us "*with groanings too deep for words.*".

And sometimes - the Church doesn't just speak hope, She lets us see it.
Our candles make some of that hope visible.
The altar candles proclaim Christ as the Light present among his gathered people.
And near the aumbry - that's the Church word for the box y'all see me go in and out of behind the table - the Sanctuary candle (or lamp).
When the reserved Blessed Sacrament is present there, the candle is lit.
It's flame tells us that Christ has given himself to us in the bread and wine of the Eucharist - and that the Sacrament remains present among us.

Honestly - most of the time - we may hardly notice that candle.
It is simply there - bearing witness to the presence of Christ in his Church.
But there is one time in our Church year when that light is extinguished.
On the night of Maundy Thursday, the altar is fully stripped – at the last when the Blessed Sacrament is removed.
Not because Christ has left his Church.
But because, liturgically, the Church now enters the waiting of Good Friday and Holy Saturday.
The candle is extinguished.
And we feel its absence deeply as we move forward without that familiar sign.

But even then, the darkness doesn't mean that Christ has abandoned us.
It means that the Church is waiting.
The promise hasn't failed.
The story hasn't ended.
We - the Church - groans, expectant to see what God is doing.
The Church remains in the space between the light we remember and the light we haven't yet seen return.

And that's something like the hope Paul describes:
"Hope that is seen is not hope."
There are times in our lives when the familiar light seems to go out.
The answer doesn't come.

The healing doesn't happen in the way we had prayed.
The path ahead disappears into darkness.
And still, the Church waits.
Still, the Church prays.
Still, the Church remembers the promise.
Not because darkness is not real, but because darkness has never been able to
extinguish the light of Christ.

Being Church together means that we keep tending the Light.
We keep praying when answers are slow.
We keep showing up when the way ahead is unclear.
We keep making room at the Table.
We keep giving - when fear tells us to hold.
We keep recognizing one another as children of God.
We keep loving this groaning creation because God has not given up on it.
And we do not confuse waiting with doing nothing.
Paul says that we wait with patience - but this patience isn't passive.
It's steadfastness.
It's the courage to remain faithful before we can see the outcome.
Because creation is still groaning.
The Spirit is still moving.
Something is still being born.

When the world groans, we may groan with it - but we have a reason not to surrender to
despair.
When we can't see what God's doing, we keep tending the light.
And when someone can't carry hope alone, the Church will carry it with them.
We are children of God.
That's where hope begins.
And, by the grace of God, we wait in hope.

Amen.
