

# Sermon Text for August 13, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Amos 9:11-15, Romans 8:18-25*

“I can’t wait!”

I read about what is happening in Virginia and how our country is so divided and how horrible those white nationalists are who want to get back to the way things were, when America was white again. I shake my head and there is a part of me that wants to join the other clergy that are there. The KKK used to come to our Florida town every year and people would be outraged, I told them ignore them, they’ll go away. But we can all agree that we don’t want any part of that movement or what they stand for. But then I take my family into Philadelphia and I see three large African American men crossing the street and my hand almost impulsively goes to the car locks and I think to myself, I’m part of the problem.

So what if my father marched with Martin Luther King Jr., so what if my college roommate was African American, so what if most of my friends on facebook have a different shade of color to their skin than I do. I’m still part of the problem, this church is still part of the problem. If we don’t know where we stand, if we aren’t clear that this is not what our Savior endorses and in fact if we aren’t clear that this is exactly what our Savior condemns, an attempt to make one group of people more fit for heaven or for earth than another. This wasn’t part of my script, but I need to tell you about a church that I am currently moderating.

You know, my official title is not really pastor. Yes, I am the pastor of this church but I am also the moderator of the session. I was asked to moderate La Iglesia di Toughkennamon, a Spanish speaking church in Chester County. July 30 I led the session and then worshipped with them. I was the only gringo, the pastor preached, two people came to accept Jesus, two people asked for prayers because their husbands had been detained by ICE. These are real people, these are people who work in the mushroom fields. These are real life people who see what is happening in Charlotte and wonder what has happened to our country.

These events catch all of our attention because they catch the headlines. But the truth of the matter is that every single day there is suffering and pain and tragedy and injustice and people who say they represent Jesus but only live to oppress and hurt others.

But isn't it great that as Christians one of the benefits of joining the church and of being baptized is that we have a hedge of protection around us and we are assured that we will never have to face tragedy in our lives or suffering? We never have to be on the receiving end of discrimination. Isn't that what the Bible says. It would be nice, it would make recruiting much easier and all the churches would be full, but the fact is that we as Christians face the same type and the same amount of tragedies and suffering as the rest of the world.

But there is a difference isn't there to our suffering and we touched upon that last week. But I just wanted to give the good news last week so we did kind of glide over the suffering part. We heard last week that we are children of God and that we have a father, an Abba who loves us so much and we have brothers and sisters and a big brother who paves the way for us so that when the Father looks at us he will only see the glory of our big brother. We have a daddy who is loving, caring, hugging, tickling, wonderful father who wants to be in relationship with us.

We like that part of the passage. But then we get to vs. 17 and we kind of covertly sneak in the part that if we suffer with Christ we will also be glorified with him. We would have been better off if we had stopped at vs. 16 but today we realize that if we are a part of the family of Christ then what come with that is the everyday suffering. WE can't just choose the joy and leave out the pain. When one of us suffers, then we all have to suffer. And those who are on the receiving end of the hatred of white supremacists are one of us because sometimes, even without knowing, we are the source of that suffering. Suffering is a reality in life, even in the Christian life, all of it. How do we as Christians deal with it, Paul gives us a good handle on that today, so if you are feeling like your soul is heavy, you've got the weight of the world on your shoulders today, listen to this next passage because it will do your soul good.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

Okay, so what does Paul say about these present sufferings? He sets them in context. You want to be children of God, you want to have a big brother, you want to have a father, great! I celebrate with you. But you enter not only into his glory but also into his suffering, his hard times. Now our first verse today says something about these present sufferings. It is no big deal. No big deal. Compared to the glory that waits for us in heaven, compared to the glory that waits for us from the inheritance from Jesus, they are not big deal. WE should be saying day in and day out, I can't wait for what comes

next. When we have finished this race, fought the good fight, compared to what we are going through now, there is no comparison, it is no big deal.

That's what the Gospel hymns were all about, in the By and By, Go tell it on the Mountain, things are bad in this world, we can't imagine them getting any worse, but there is something better coming. It is Friday, but Sunday is coming.

In other words, the worst bad that we might experience, the badness of that bad experience will be so completely outshined by the goodness of that glory which waits us as adopted children that our present sufferings will one day seem as nothing. Look at our first Scripture in Amos when he states I can't wait, on that day I will repair all the breaches, all that which is broken and hurts. The mountains will drip sweet wine, I will restore the fortunes of my people, and I will establish them forever. Amos is saying to a people who had just experienced military defeat, tortures, killings, and suffering and he himself had gone through it. Just look at what is coming up, its no big deal what we are going through now compared to what the future holds for us.

As white American Christians we don't talk too much about our eternal future because frankly when you're running the country and the world you don't have to think too much about it. We've lost our perspective on what the sweet by and by will be like. 30 or 40 years ago we would hear almost exclusive sermons on what heaven would be like. Today we are not interested in that, we want it all now. No deferred gratification for me, heaven, fine, that's nice but how can you make my life better now. I'm only going around once so I want it all now!

Even in our Christian teachings we need to make sure we make the present day application because we want to know how do we live our life now. There is some truth to that because there is a danger of being so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good. But God does care about this world on which we live to send him his only Son to redeem it and redeem us so he is interested in making our earthly life good and to make us just.

But the problem is that we have become too focused on this life, too focused on the world, too focused on this now, We have lost perspective. As a result there are some of us who feel like we are losing our power, our priority, our supremacy. That makes us nervous and that makes us want to think only about the now, and ourselves, and not others. Certainly not others who look and think differently from us.

The big picture my brothers and sisters has gone out of focus. What is the big picture? The bit picture is however serious we may take this life, however important it may be, however good it is, however crummy it has been, in the eternal scheme of things, in God's glorious plan for his children this life is (snap). If life is (snap) what about our sufferings? I can't even snap that fast. We have lost perspective and as Christians we would do well to stand back, raise our eyes out of the things that surround us, the muck that we think we are in and look ahead to the glory that awaits us. No big deal. When we do that then we are able to put into perspective others around us who are striving and wanting the same things as us and not see them as a threat.

Paul is telling us about this future relationship that we will have as children of God. How our bitter sufferings will be forgotten, but then he pauses. How can we prove this, what kind of example can I give to bring it home? How can I make this come to life? I know I would have said this if I were writing because we are dealing here with people who are suffering, their children are being taken from them, their parents are being killed, they are being tortured. If I make light of their sufferings are they going to be able to hear me beyond their own pain?

What can I give them as an illustration of how pain can be a transition point to something glorious and great when suddenly, aha- a light bulb comes on, I guess it was a candle and ladies what example does he use? What is his illustration? Labor pains, child birth. What better illustration of how enduring pain can lead to a promise of a glorious future. Of course as men we never really quite understood this no matter how many lemanse classes we went to.

When a child is being born we know that there is a lot of pain going on there. When a child is born all of that is behind you – the groaning, screaming, digging, pain, suffering. When we see the glorious future for which we had waited all of that is forgotten.

And that's what Paul is talking about. Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. The creation itself will be set free. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. Paul likes this image so much that he sets up not just one but two pregnant women. The first one is creation. You remember how creation paid a price for our sinfulness, think back to Genesis, I know it was a long time ago but look at verse 17 of chapter 3. Even creation suffered because our rejection of God. So even creation is groaning, longing to give birth to be set free, it

can't wait for what is coming. And what is coming? A new perfect world, a world that is unstained by its inhabitants. Even today the earth is groaning, it labors under the sin of its stewards.

But there is a second pregnant woman. If creation groans, who else is involved? That's right, us. Not only creation but vs. 23 we ourselves who have the fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait. We know that God loves us, we are called to be his children, he is our father, we will meet our brother Jesus face to face, that is our hope, we hope God will deliver, but not yet. Now we are still in labor. Some of us our contractions are far apart, we can breathe and enjoy life between the contractions, for others they are coming one on top of another and you feel like you haven't even had the time to catch your breath when another one comes rolling in.

I know that some of you are feeling that way this morning. I get the phone calls, the tears in the eyes when a test comes back with cancer, or you've lost a loved one, or you don't know what to do with your children, or a spouse is losing a job, or you are in the midst of a divorce, alone afraid, and sometimes all these things happen all at once, not just one at a time. You are in pain, in labor and somebody's hand is getting mutilated under your fingers as you go through it.

What does Paul say to us when the contractions of life are coming so close together? First he says keep it in perspective. I know it is swallowing you whole and it is up to your nostrils. If you can possibly do it, lift your eyes above the present circumstances and look ahead to the glory that awaits you. For there is a glory that is not worth comparing to the pain that you are feeling now. This too shall pass, it may be a painful passing, but this too shall pass. God is not done with you yet and God has something great in store for you.

Paul could say this because he knew what he was talking about here. There is no cheap grace here for Paul. Listen to II Corinthians 11:21. When Paul says he considers these present sufferings as no big deal, he knew what he was talking about. I'll make it.

Secondly Paul tells us that our sufferings give us a chance to share in Christ's own suffering. If we want to share in the glory we better be ready to share in the sufferings. When we suffer then we can receive them as Christ did and know that somehow out of this suffering we will be able to become a richer, deeper person. How do we do that? By recognizing that how we live our lives and what we think has an impact on people who don't have the same opportunities that we have.

One of the most powerful ways to deal with our suffering is to take hold of it and claim it and say Jesus you've endured far more than I ever have, now I am going to learn from this and I am going to love you even more because I am going to understand what I am going through. But I can't wait to learn.

I don't mean to be callous when I say that it is no big deal, because I know that right now it is a big deal, it is the only deal. But there are ways that God has allows us to engage our sufferings so that we can be richer, and deeper, and purer than we have ever been. Lift up your head from where you are, look forward to what God has in store. Amen.