

MESSAGE FOR 11TH JULY 2021.

Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21.

Romans 8:18-27.

Bishop Tom Wright who is a leading Bible scholar is the author of a book called “God and the Pandemic”. I commend it to you.

According to Tom Wright one of the most important passages to help us understand the current pandemic and all the other tragedies that have occurred throughout human history is our passage from Romans 8.

Romans 8 is regarded as the mountain top of scripture. As a chapter it is full of faith, hope and love. Verses 37-39 speak of the outpouring of love for humanity through the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. For it is that which provides us with the victory over all that is dark along with security in the present age and the age to come.

However, just as the Israelites had to travel through the wilderness to reach the promised land, we too as follower of Christ have to go through times of wilderness, despair and darkness before we reach the promises made to us through Christ.

That ultimate inheritance is not merely our arrival in heaven, but it is a completely renewed creation when corruption, death and decay exist no more. Heaven coming to earth, rather than us going to heaven is the hope that Paul speaks of.

The whole world is groaning at this time, says our Epistle and so also are we. It’s not only the world that is groaning, says Paul but we ourselves, as Christian believers are those who groan inwardly as we wait for our adoption as sons and daughters and for the redemption of our bodies.

Just as Christ did, we are called to share in the groaning of creation. And that is the calling of the Church during the current chaos that surrounds us.

God Himself is groaning and sighing within us by His Spirit. He is not standing apart, just watching our struggles from a distance. He is the God who comes to help us in all our weakness. He came in the person of Jesus Christ to live among us, to take the griefs, sorrows and evils of the world upon Himself as He was brutally murdered on the First Good Friday. He also came to conquer death on the First Easter Day. And He comes to us now in the person of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us in all our groanings. He groans along with us in our prayers and He can strengthen us to keep going in a painful and suffering world.

Do you know the origin of the word “sympathy”. It comes from a Greek word and it literally means “suffering with”. To sympathize is to suffer with. This is our God, the God who suffers with us, struggles with us. But that’s not all because our God is also the God of hope and His promise is that at the last Jesus Christ will come again to end all our struggles and to bring us into an eternal and perfect existence.

God works his purpose through us in the midst of a suffering world. Tom Wright makes the point that this is why lament is so important. In lamenting with the world and lamenting for our own losses we become aware of the needs around us in our families and wider community. We may not always be able to put our lament into words but we can lament through action. That action involves healing, teaching, relieving poverty where we can, campaigning, comforting and listening.

We are called according to God's purpose and even now, God is using the groaning at the heart of the world's pain, as the vehicle for the Spirit's own work. We hold the sorrow of the world before God and that creates the means of grace for healing and ultimately the hope we can pass to others as we point them to the promise of a new creation.

It is the hope that assures us that Covid 19 and all other terrible things will not have the last word. God will have the last Word and so as Christian believers we can join with Julian of Norwich in her famous words "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well". Amen.