

If there was a musical background as we read through Romans 8, there would be a dramatic crescendo as we reach this passage.

We've been talking about "in flesh/in Spirit,"—"in flesh"—to think the way the world thinks, value what the world values, believe the culture's definition of success

"in Spirit"—to see life, meaning, purpose through the eyes of the Spirit

And Paul has been talking about "children of God" = our high calling, our identity, which lifts, ennobles, encourages us

Now view expands: all creation waits with eager longing

apokaradokia – the head (*kara*) out (*apo*) looking forward – eager expectation – standing on tiptoe

Here we strike once more the characteristic note of "now and not yet" that runs right through Paul: we have already received 'the spirit of ...sonship/adoption' (v.15); we are already "children of God" (vv. 16-17); and yet there is a form of this "sonship/adoption" for which we still eagerly long. The link between present and future is made, again as usual, by the Spirit, who is the "first fruits," that part of God's future redeeming power that is brought forward into the present, so that the prayer of the child in the present time (vv. 15-16) truly points on to the future resurrection glory (vv. 11,17). (Tom Wright, *NIB*, p. 597)

foretaste – like grabbing a piece of turkey in the kitchen on Thanksgiving...

Ah, but you say—look at the mess the world's in...

wars, ecological disaster, thousands murdered in battle of drug cartels, greed, governmental and international organizations that seem unable to do much about the world's problems, etc, etc.

Paul: we need to see these things for what they are.

Imagine if you came upon a woman—face contorted in pain, groaning. You'd probably think something awful had happened to her...

till someone tells you she's in labor—the pains are labor pains.

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

Paul: the 'mess' of the world—from the perspective of hope: labor pains, something new struggling to be born. Not just in individuals. Paul would have had no sympathy with a Christianity which confined its attention wholly to one's inner life and the saving of one's own soul. (James D. Smart, *Doorway to a New Age*, p. 111)

The "eager longing" is expressed in

- the cry of women mutilated by female circumcision
- the cry of children dying of diseases caused by drinking impure water
- the struggles of Jews in Israel and Arabs in Gaza locked in a seemingly unsolvable death struggle,
- the gushing of oil 5,000 beneath the Gulf of Mexico,
- the rapid melting of Arctic glaciers,
- wherever people long to be free,
- wherever the planet is ravaged by our hyper-consumption,
- wherever young people yearn for education
- wherever soldiers and civilians are trapped in brutal fighting

These are the sights and sounds of a creation "groaning in travail" for the coming of the new age. They *impel* the Church to take with full seriousness the dimensions of its calling. (James D. Smart, *Doorway to a New Age*, p. 112)

Which means the church and its members must be involved in the social and political struggles of the day.

234 years ago the colonists experienced ‘labor pains’ and waited with eager longing. The document approved on 4 July 1776 outlined their complaints—their labor pains, if you will. And the vision of the new day they longed for was expressed: we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men. How could they say these truths are ‘self-evident?’ In large part because colonial preachers had been expressing the hope for something new from their pulpits for years!

The ensuing discourse is the last of three upon the same subject, with some little alterations and additions. It is hoped that but few will think the subject of it an improper one to be discoursed in the pulpit, under a notion that this is preaching politics, instead of CHRIST. However, to remove all prejudices of this sort, I beg it may be remembered, that “all scripture—is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for CORRECTION, for instruction in righteousness.” (2 Peter 3:16). Why, then, should not those parts of scripture which relate to civil government, be examined and explained from the desk [pulpit], as well as others? Obedience to the civil magistrate is a Christian duty: and if so, why should not the nature, grounds and extent of it be considered in a Christian assembly? Besides, if it be said, that it is out of character for a Christian minister to meddle with such a subject, this censure will at last fall upon the holy apostles. They write upon it in their epistles to Christian churches: And surely it cannot be deemed either criminal or impertinent, to attempt an explanation of their doctrine. (Jonathan Mayhew, “A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers, Boston, Massachusetts, January 1750, *American Sermons*, pp. 380-381)

And—Paul says—what keeps us going is hope.

Not = optimism

In *TIME* magazine questions to Desmond Tutu: After all you've seen and endured, are you really as optimistic as your book, *Made for Goodness*, says you are? Zelalem Dawit, ADDIS ABABA

Tutu: I'm not optimistic, no. I'm quite different. I'm hopeful. I am a prisoner of hope. In the world, you have very bad people--Hitler, Idi Amin--and they look like they are going to win. All of them--all of them--have bitten the dust. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1971410,00.html#ixzz0sMRLDJok>

Likewise Jesus – when asked by the followers of John the Baptist if he [Jesus] was the one they were expecting, he simply pointed to the things he'd been doing: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. Had everything changed? Of course not. But there was reason to hope—look at what had already been done.

Christians are those [no political agenda here!] who have the audacity to hope.

Audacity = daring/boldness/courage/bravery/nerve

My eye will never know the dry disease

Of thinking things no more than what he sees. (Richard Wilbur in *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*, p. 41)

If creation is to be renewed, not abandoned, and if that work has already begun in the resurrection of Jesus...Christians must be in the forefront of bringing, in the present time, signs and foretastes of God's eventual full healing to bear upon the created order in all its parts and at every level. If the world is to be put to rights, brought under the saving lordship of God's restorative justice, and if that work has already been unveiled prototypically in Jesus' death and resurrection...Christians must be in the forefront of bringing, in the present time, signs and foretastes of God's healing justice to bear upon the world that is still full of corruption, injustice, oppression, division, suspicion, and war. And if the world is to attain its full beauty and dignity as God's liberated new creation, a beauty and dignity for which the present evidences of god's grandeur within creation are just a foretaste...Christians must be in the forefront of bringing, in the present time, signs and foretastes of god's fresh beauty to birth within the world, signs of hope for what the Spirit will yet do: (Tom Wright, *NIB*, p. 606)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings. Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89)

PRAYER

Our hearts and minds expand, O God,
as the whole creation joins together.

On the one hand crying out, moaning.
Abandoned, abused children.
Mutilated women.
Tortured prisoners.
Oil-slick waters.
Unexposed raw sewage.
Unemployed workers.
Crying out for the church's response—
our response.
What will we do?

On the other hand crying out, praising.
Gorgeous days.
Bright dawns.
New-born babies.
Urban renewal.
Earth filled with iron, petroleum, gold, magnesium—
so many more.
Corn more than shoulder high.
We join the chorus of praise.

On this Fourth of July help this nation to be—as Lincoln said—the last best hope of earth by living our values:
conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

We join in the great song: may Jesus Christ be praised!