

August 9, 2020  
St. Charles Ave Presbyterian Church  
Romans 8:12-25  
Rev. Sarah Chancellor-Watson

### “Inheritance of Hope”

Scrolling through my facebook newsfeed, I see a photo of the ear to ear toothy grin of a child, wearing their Sunday best, standing in front of what is obviously a judges bench, surrounded by adults who share an equally joyful grin, holding a sign that says, “After 1,472 days in foster care, Today I finally have my forever family.” Perhaps, you too have seen these joyful posts and ones like it, of a family who has been made whole and complete through adoption, of a family who has waited with persistent hope as they jump through bureaucratic hoops and make legal what has been true in their hearts for much longer than this particular day. I’m sure that there are some of you here this morning who know exactly the frustrations and the joys of adopting a child or of being adopted and of finding your forever family.

In ancient Roman society, children, especially heirs for anyone of means, were highly valued. However, some children, particularly of the poor and desperate, would be abandoned or sold into slavery with common regularity. The lucky ones were adopted by wealthy childless couples, and would enjoy all the rights and privileges of natural born children, as full and legal heirs of that family. Paul uses this image of adoption to help explain the believer’s new identity in light of what God has done for them in Jesus Christ. Paul assures the church in Rome that when they take on the Spirit of God, they are not abandoned or kept in slavery to sin and death, but are indeed adopted into God’s great family.

This idea of being able to claim the identity of a son and daughter of God, was pretty radical in both the Jewish and Roman world-view. For the Jews it was Israel, God’s chosen people, who was called the first-born of God. It is particularly important for us to know that “son of god” was among Caesar’s many titles, and that part of his power derived from his privileged status from the gods. So for those in the new Church to be able to claim such status was radical. We must never forget that the adoption that Paul is talking about is an act of grace

and the inheritance of glory and life eternal with God and Christ, is one that is freely given by God. As heirs, we do not work for or earn this inheritance, it is simply part of our very identity. But with this great gift comes responsibilities and a warning from Paul. As co-heirs with Christ we share not only in his glory, but also in his suffering. The suffering that we experience now, Paul tells us, is not even worth comparing to the future glory we will receive, but that still does not mean we are immune to suffering in this world.

I have now lived in New Orleans and have been a part of this congregation for 4 years now, and in that time I've learned a lot, and still this city is teaching me and surprising me in many ways. When I first arrived, one of our elders said that in New Orleans you will find the best of the best and worst of the worst. The city of New Orleans is a city of contradictions and impossible paradoxes. It's like the second lines of a traditional jazz funeral, with the songs that accompany the dead to their final resting place ranging from the somber *Just a Closer Walk With Thee*, to the festival like – *Oh When The Saints Go Marching In*, with those in the second line dancing and singing along. In the Jazz funeral you have both deep and profound grief *and* celebration and joy, all right there next to each other, interwoven, on display. I have learned that the whole city of New Orleans is like this, living in the tension of great tragedy and suffering, but also celebration, triumph, resilience and joy.

I think one of the things our scripture is telling us that you don't have to live in New Orleans to understand this reality. Even children of God, who have great hope and joy in the love and grace of God, still experience pain and suffering. One of the reasons we suffer is because we are still in the realm of sin, or "of the flesh" as Paul puts it – which is not to say that our human embodied lives are inherently evil, far from it in fact as God redeems even our bodies – but speaks to the world order of the flesh in which selfish desires, violence, betrayal, destruction, and death reign, and not the life-giving Spirit of God. Not only are we still influenced by sin's presence in our lives, but our suffering is compounded by the fact that we have tasted the "first fruits of the Spirit" and we know that something better is out there. We know that there is much in our world that is not right. We already know the power of Christ's victory over sin and death, and the freedom we have in that power. We already know God's unfailing love and boundless grace. It is like we have been invited to a fancy dinner party, at our favorite

restaurant - you remember restaurants and gathering together with others to share a meal. We know the food is going to be Michelin star quality. Emeril Lagassi – or whoever is your favorite chef is – is in the kitchen cooking up their finest. And the first course comes out and it is the best food you've ever tasted, and you want more! You now know what good food should taste like with everything in season, local, fresh, seasoned and cooked to perfection!

When we ourselves suffer or when see the suffering of the world all around us we naturally get frustrated and angry and sad, and we groan with all of creation because we know things are not as they should be. We know things can and should be better. And suffering is not evidence of God's abandonment or separation, rather it is a sign of living in the conflict zone between "this present time" and "the age to come." Our suffering is not without hope. The groans we utter are not groans of resignation, but groans of resolution and resilience. It is this hope that keeps us from despair and keeps us going despite the obstacles and gives us the strength in the face of adversity.

Our identity as heirs informs us in times of suffering that that the way things are, are not the way they should be or will be in the end. Our identity as God's children also gives us the responsibility to join in the work of hope that God is already doing all around us. God invites us not only into the family, but into the family business. Where we are to give hope where it is needed most, to work for justice and to take care of each other, just as God has always taken care of us. Paul reminds us that the Spirit of God is already within us. This Spirit allows us to walk in the midst of suffering and gives us the strength, strength to hope, even when everything is chaotic and frightening and not as it should be. It is same Spirit which allows us to cry out to God, - Abba! Father! and it is the same Spirit which answers back, "Yes my child? I'm here."

Go Forth as beloved Children of God, living in Hope and confident in God's promises.

May God our parent, Christ our brother, and the Spirit who gives us breath bless you and keep you this day and forevermore.