

Sunday, July 19, 2020

Romans 8:12-25

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. 18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

How many have a cell phone? First cellular phone was made in 1973. Martin Cooper, a senior engineer at Motorola, called a rival telecommunications company and informed them he was speaking via a mobile phone. The phone Cooper used – if you could call it that – weighed a staggering 2.5 pounds. With this prototype device, you got 30 minutes of talk-time and it took around 10 hours to charge.

How many have dropped their land line? Why?

When was the last time you picked up an encyclopedia? Encyclopedia Britannica ceased print production in 2012.

Remember when the host or hostess at a restaurant asked you “smoking or no smoking?”

Who had a car without seat belts?

If you’ve lived any length of time, you’ve seen something that was commonplace changed by something that at the time was out of the ordinary.

There are typically two types of change we face. One is technical change. It is often incremental and can be accomplished by addressing the challenge in front of us with an incremental, technical solutions. As we faced the need to stop in-person worship, we used Facebook Live with a very small group to bring the service to others. This was a little different, but we found it worked.

Now that some have been able to get together in-person again, we still face dangers from the virus, we have returned to worship in the sanctuary with precautions, but are still streaming our service on Facebook. We have realized that this is a way that even more people can connect in community even at different times. This is the beginning of adaptive change, a way we understand who we are and what we are doing in fundamentally different ways. Online worship will probably become regular and encourage us to think of new ways those who are part of our congregations to engage the faith with us. If we had attempted this pre-COVID, it would not have been as easy. Paul's words in Romans give us some insight today—insight that we may be able to apply to other areas of our lives as well.

Most people are resistant to change. They don't like it. (I know I don't) Some even fear it. Change requires leaving behind what is comfortable, even instinctual for actions and attitudes that we don't know how they will work. It's risky. It carries the potential of failure. Maybe that's why we are more open to adaptive change when previous options seem no longer available.

Paul tells the Romans that they are not held captive to the flesh—to actions and attitudes that have become comfortable. They were living in a time when life for many was good. Christianity in the city was growing, but so was the Emperor's fear of it. A major change in life was beginning to emerge—and Paul was focusing the believers on life in the Spirit, not in the flesh.

We all tend to prefer the familiar, the comfortable, the predictable. There's nothing wrong with that unless it keeps us from living in the reality where God is taking God's people. We recall from the creation poems in the first two chapters of Genesis that when God rested on the seventh day, God had turned over the care of creation to people. In times of change, we are still stewards of that creation.

Paul says in verse 14 that all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. What a honor and privilege and responsibility we have as God's beloved children. The creator of the universe, whom we address as Father in the Lord's Prayer, is at work in us, with us and through us—to bring creation to its fullest expression. And when creation is groaning in futility, we are the voices of hope.

I have been touched by the stories of care for the community I've been hearing in Dunlap and Moorhead and beyond. In the midst of something none of us have seen in our lifetime, God's people are reaching out, supporting, praying and caring for their neighbors. Even though I've hardly met you, you have welcomed me and made me feel part of this faith family. You have been living out the hope Paul described at the end of today's second lesson. And you've been waiting for what God is doing with patience and grace.

I wish I could say that this will all be over in a few weeks. It looks like we've still got a way to go. And we have some more adaptive changes to make as we define who we are and what God is calling us to do. But you, beloved children of God, have been doing what is needed and I'm confident will continue faithfully on this journey. The leaders at St. John and Bethesda are responsibly and faithfully caring for the congregations and communities. The path forward will be one of learning and experimentation, reflection and celebration. Your prayers and gracious participation are necessary. Together we will see the revealing of the children of God—some already in our midst and others drawn to Christ by our witness.