

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There is a great groaning in creation, deep within our souls, labor pains as we await the full potential, the full expectation for creation to be realized. It is this groaning, this painful expectation for something, for kingdom, to be seen, to be felt, to be actualized in the here and now, that we have been struggling with for our entire history as a church, perhaps our entire history as creation.

Paul, in writing to the Romans, really was convinced that Jesus' return was to happen literally at any moment. Paul felt that the end of times had come, that Jesus' second coming was nigh, that the work of the church was to prepare the way for that to happen the very next day, if it weren't to happen that very day. Paul (at least while writing to the Romans) was convinced that he, himself, would see the second coming of Christ in his lifetime. Thus, for Paul, these groans of labor pains reverberating throughout creation signaled the moment where we were to be pushed into a new existence, leaving the place of our creation in the womb to be fully realized in the embrace of God in God's kingdom experienced here in God's creation. But, Jesus did not come again while Paul was still alive. Jesus has not yet come again for these past two thousand years. These groans have continued as the labor has proven itself to be laborious and long. We are still waiting. We are still pushing to see the promise of creation fully realized. We are groaning as this creation pushes back against our best efforts.

And yet, we are co-creators in this world with God. As much as creation may push against us, fight us, tear down what we try to build up, we must continue to persevere and build up, create life, create opportunities for life to be experienced in its true fullness, full of

love for self, love for neighbor, love for the stranger, love for our enemy, love for God, without fear of how others may react to our loving and faithful expression of that life. Because of this, because we are co-creators with God, because we must persevere and persist in building up even as others try to tear down, we must operate with the following expectations.

We must first approach this work with the expectation that the work we do better this creation for all in it. When we have this expectation, it serves to drive us forward in doing the work of creation and it verifies our work, even if those whom we do it for do not know, or can not acknowledge, for whatever reason.

We have to approach this work with the expectation that God approves of the good work that we do. When we do work in the model of ministry that has been left for us by Jesus Christ, when we do work that spreads the Good News of Christ, the Good News of God's love in this world, then we must know that God approves of this work and that we are creating because it is what we are called to do as followers of Christ and co-creators with God in this creation.

We have to expect that we will make mistakes. We are human, we make mistakes. I make mistakes. I make mistakes here in this role as a priest. And in making mistakes, we must work with the expectation that we will be forgiven for those mistakes, both by those who are impacted by them, and by God.

We have to expect that, at times, some may turn from God in sin, in lack of faith, in hurt and anger. Sin is an easy avenue to slip into, and slip deeper and deeper into. And it's not just the public facing acts either, it's the sin of our hearts, the sin that permeates

through our being and prevents us from creating in this world. Faith is hard. And I will come back to that. Hurt and anger, at each other, at God, happens in this world. Hurt and anger, especially at God, leads many to turn away. They are left wondering why God would allow violence and catastrophe to impact creation. They are left wondering why God would see a 19 year old girl die of complications from routine surgery. They are left wondering why God would allow that person to do that thing to them. And yet, even in turning away from God, we must have the expectation, the knowledge that God will always be there to welcome us back, to hold us tight, to say "I know" as we scream in our pain and anger.

We have to expect that as co-creators in this world we have the gift and responsibility to see the labor pains ended and the birth of a fully realized creation seen on this earth in our lifetimes.

These expectations mean we have hard work ahead of us. It will be, already has been, discouraging. It will be, already has been, life-giving. This dichotomy is what makes this work so hard, for with the highest of highs, we also get the lowest of lows. But it is also this dichotomy that makes this work so worth it.

Facebook often reminds me of how good and how hard this work can be. I use facebook primarily as a tool to stay connected to (in addition to close friends and family) colleagues and to those who I am active in ministry, which means many of you. And while I scroll through the Facebook news feed, I feel many emotions. Often I'm happy, for people, for work being done, for the gift of comedy and humor. Somewhat less often, but still pretty regularly, I have feelings of anger, which do follow a scale from eye roll up to shaking of fist, an emotion I'd like to have less of, and an emotion that I'm largely responsible for. I have a

smattering of other emotions but if you scroll through my facebook feed you'd understand why it is predominantly those two emotions.

Which is why something I saw this past week has really stuck with me. It was a post that initially got a reaction of anger, roughly a combined eye roll and general huff of dismissal and disgust, but after seeing it pop up over and over as more and more people left comments, and after reading this passage from Romans today, I felt an emotion I don't normally associate with facebook, true sadness for another person, not because they or a loved one was sick or had died, but because of the hurt and pain and anger that person must have been feeling to post what they did.

The poster felt that over the past few months their identity in this world has been belittled and categorized into neat, offensive check boxes, a reality that I would personally counsel that person to challenge in their thinking, but it must have hit home enough to post it in a public sphere, so there is definitely something there. There is definitely hurt and pain and anger that this person is feeling about how they are viewed by others. There is definitely hurt and pain and anger about how this person feels they are threatened for holding views that others find offensive. And, there is hurt and pain and anger that perhaps some of these classifiers ring a little more true than they would like to admit to themselves, something I think we all experience when we are labeled negatively.

This post reminded me that, as much as we are co-creators in this world with God, if we aren't also co-creators in this world with each other, none of the good work will get done. We cannot create, create life, create joy, create the kingdom, if we are constantly tearing each other down, destroying the trust we must have between each other,

destroying the chance to listen faithfully and honestly to one another, knowing that we will disagree but still needing to understand how that actually impacts others. We cannot be co-creators when we are so busy being the destructors of this creation.

And this is where hope comes in. This is where faith, comes in (I told you I'd come back to it). Hope, as Paul tells us, cannot be seen. And yet, hope is often all we can have. Hope drives our faith. Hope is that expectation of God, that knowledge of God, and, that faith that through these expectations, through our knowledge of God, that we can still be the co-creators with God, that we can change the hearts of those who turn away from God, in hurt and pain and anger. We can still be the co-creators with each other. For without hope, what is the point of our work as co-creators? Without hope, what is the point of our existence?

When we embrace hope, we embrace faith. When we embrace hope we can answer to the pain of others and serve them as givers of light and love. When we embrace hope, we embrace our role as co-creators in this world. When we embrace hope, we embrace the groaning of the labor pains as we work to help shepherd this place, this time, these people, into the creation that has always been planned for us, that has always been intended for us, if we simply accept it and have faith that when we do this work, God is with us, our expectations are known and realized, and our faith carries us through it all.

Amen.