

Sermon for July 19, 2020 by the Reverend Jeff Cook

Today's scripture reading is from Paul's letter to the first century church communities in Rome. Here is a brief summary of what Paul said:

"We're pregnant!"

What Paul actually wrote was:

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning IN LABOUR PAINS until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves....groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

That's a lot of groaning...not unlike a delivery room!

That first century of Paul's wasn't an easy time in which to live.

There was an economic chasm between the few wealthy and the legions of the poor.

The reigning world power was the Roman Empire with its dominating military complex. Its motto could have been "Let's keep Rome great."

The 'church' consisted of small, scattered communities of disciples, meeting in houses or in the backrooms of shops.

It wasn't an easy time in which to live, but I'm not sure there has ever been an easy time – a time without conflicts, without oppression and marginalization.

It's not easy today...there is a lot of groaning: creation is groaning from the effects of climate change, people groaning under the dehumanizing attitudes and actions of racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, military conflicts....

Plus, COVID-19 has instilled uncertainty, physical distancing, and economic hardships ...groan!

It's not an easy time for faith communities who, even before the pandemic, were wondering what the place and future of faith communities would be in Western societies.

Some seek answers to the question of what our communities and our world will look like in the future.

The Christian scriptures tend not to give answers, but to tell stories and evoke images and metaphors and imaginative restatements of what we are experiencing.

Such as - Creation is groaning in labour pains – is pregnant.

Our faith, our trust in God, invites us to reimagine, to restate this difficult time in which we live, as a time of pregnancy – a time of God birthing a new way of humans relating to each other and to the rest of creation.

We reimagine: First, that God is pregnant. God is always giving birth to new creation – birthing stars and planets and creatures in the book of Genesis; birthing a new identity for freed slaves as they wandered and complained and received amazing blessings for 40 years in the wilderness; birthing prophetic visions that we must transform our weapons into garden tools. The story of Jesus' resurrection is a birth story, a tomb becomes a womb and all that Jesus was and shall be is alive and present with his disciples in way that is higher, deeper, wider, more expansive and amazing than anything they had experience before.

Second, creation is groaning in labour pains, creation is pregnant. Matthew Fox, a contemporary mystic, says a shaman once told him that animals are very concerned about humans and have held councils to consider how to help us. Creation groans for the birth of a world in which humans live in more respectful and harmonious relations with all of God's creation.

Thirdly, the church is pregnant!

The church is undergoing a birthing process – which can be a time of excitement and anxiety, a time of preparation, a time of transition, as future expressions of the church continue to be born.

Finally, we humans are pregnant, still being born as people of compassion and love and justice; still birthing structures and systems and behaviours that are just and honouring and loving of all and for all.

The Genesis story tells us that we are made in the image of God. Julian of Norwich, a mystic of the middle ages, rephrased that to say that we are made of God; everywhere and everything is part of God, reveals the Divine, the Sacred.

God is pregnant, therefore creation is pregnant, the church is pregnant, we are pregnant – pregnant with new life, and with Christ's resurrecting presence in our lives. Thanks be to God. AMEN.