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BUT, FOR NOW, WE WAIT
FIFTH IN THE SERIES ON "THE WAY OUT" OF THE HUMAN DILEMMA
ROMANS 8:18-25

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A little boy was visiting his grandmother. She, in good grandmother fashion, used every opportunity to tell him about Jesus. She told him stories at bedtime, stories in the afternoon, stories while they were walking. She took him to Sunday School and Sunday worship. One day he came to the table without washing his hands. "But, Grandma, they're clean!" Grandma replied, "There are germs on your hands, so go wash them." As he left the table, he muttered, "Germs and Jesus, germs and Jesus, that's all I hear around here, and you can't see either one of them!" No, and sometimes it is not easy to see the way out of the human dilemma of sin and death. Sometimes you just can't see progress. Are things really getting any better?

In last week's sermon we caught a glimpse of how the Holy Spirit is leading us out of the human situation into the glorious kingdom of God by adopting us as God's children. Paul's image of adoption is beautiful. As adopted children of God, we are no longer possessed or controlled by sin, but now God is our parent and we belong to God's family. But it is hard to see the difference, like seeing germs and Jesus. After catching a vision of how the Holy Spirit leads us, what a letdown to settle back into the world, where homes break up and people divorce, where they shoot at one another on the Los Angeles freeways, where a Nazi youth group in Mountain View roams the streets, attacking black women, looking for ways to keep the Aryan race pure, where a tornado raises havoc in Canada killing people and destroying homes.

Paul begins our passage this morning acknowledging that we have not yet received the inheritance; the kingdom of God has not yet come in its fullness. After his vision of glory, Paul comes back to the troubled state of this present world. He wrote in Romans 8:18, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." And he ends the passage in verse 25 with, "we wait for it with patience." We wait. Even though we can't see germs, Jesus, and the coming glory of God's reign, we hope. Paul says in verse 24 that "hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." We wait, but our waiting is not a passive waiting. Waiting does not mean sitting on our hands doing nothing.

William Barclay, in his commentary on Romans, poetically wrote,
pp. 115-116

The one blazing truth that lit life for Paul was the tremendous fact that the human situation is not a hopeless situation...life was an eager anticipation of a liberation, a renovation and a re-creation wrought by the glory and the power of God.

In verse 19 he uses a wonderful word for "eager expectation." The word is *apokaradokia*; it describes the attitude of one who scans the horizon with head thrust forward eagerly searching the distance for the first signs of the dawn break of glory. To Paul life was not a weary, defeated waiting; life was a throbbing, vivid expectation. The Christian is involved in the human situation. Within he must battle with his own evil human nature; without he must live in a world of death and decay. But, nonetheless, the Christian does not only live in the world; he also

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lives in Christ. He does not only see the world; he looks beyond the world to God. The Christian does not only see the consequence of his sin; he sees the power of God's mercy and God's love. And, therefore, the key-note of the Christian life is always hope and never despair. The Christian waits, not for death, but for life.

We wait expectantly, and we do not wait alone. The entire creation is waiting. Verse 19, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing." And verse 21, "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God." The New Age, the New Order, will encompass not only human life but the natural order as well. In fact, you really can't separate humans from nature. We are not a breed set apart. We are interrelated with the created order. We humans cannot exist apart from the earth, and our behavior as humans affects the earth. Greedy agricultural practices have created deserts. Poisonous pollution is tearing a hole in the ozone layer above the Antarctic which will have a devastating effect on climate.

Humans cannot be separated from earth, and both orders--the natural order and the human order--are waiting for liberation, waiting for fulfillment, waiting for the adoption papers to be completed, waiting to receive God's inheritance. We are waiting and, in the meantime, the old order is decaying. We are in bondage to decay, but liberty is in sight.

For my light bedtime reading, I just finished Dean R. Koontz's book, Strangers. It's an interesting fantasy about reactions to strangers, extraterrestrials, landing on the earth. Koontz makes a point which might explain why we are experiencing a decline in morals and a collapse of our traditions and institutions. He wrote, pp. 612-613,

Anthropologists tell us that when an advanced culture interacts with one less advanced, the less advanced culture suffers a loss of confidence in--and often a complete collapse of--its traditions and institutions. The primitive culture loses respect for its religions and systems of government. Its sexual practices, social values, and family structures deteriorate. Look what happened to the Eskimos following their encounter with Western civilization: soaring alcoholism, family-destroying generational conflict, a high rate of suicide...It's not that Western culture is dangerous or evil. It isn't. But our culture was far more sophisticated and richly textured than the Eskimo culture, and contact led to a serious loss of self-esteem among the Eskimos that they've never regained and never will.

Consider the American Indian. Ultimately, the white man's guns didn't destroy them; the clash of cultures did them in; the influx of new ideas forced the Indians to view their comparatively primitive societies from a different perspective, resulting in a loss of esteem, a loss of cultural validity and direction...Contact between mankind and very advanced extraterrestrials could have those same

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effects on us: the destruction of religious faith, a loss of faith in all governments and other secular belief-systems, a rising feeling of inferiority, suicide.

I found that a fascinating idea and a possible explanation of what is happening in our culture today. We have not been invaded by an advanced extraterrestrial culture, but we have been invaded by the kingdom of God, at least the beginning stages. Perhaps our traditions, mores, values, and belief systems are decaying because a more advanced way of life is trying to break through. Perhaps the old order is decaying because the New Order is trying to be born. There is an increasing interest in the Spirit and things of the Spirit in the world today. When Bishop Stanley Downes of India was with us, he lectured in the 9:00 class and stated that all over the world there is an increase of interest in the Spirit, not in religion as such, but in the Spirit. This phenomenon is occurring across cultures and religions. It is not unique to Christianity; in many ways, the traditional church has been the slowest to respond. How often God has to work outside organized religion to get his work done!

Those who are interested in astrology tell us that we are living in the last days of the Pisces Age. The Age of Aquarius is dawning. The Pisces Age is characterized by order, law, institutions, and the Age of Aquarius is characterized by the spirit and the inner life. Social scientists today point out there is a breakdown of the traditional hierarchical pyramid social structure and the breakthrough of a team-centered, democratic, shared leadership style, with an emphasis on people living together in community. Even in business circles we see this phenomenon. These are exciting days. The old is dying; the new is being born.

Paul uses the imagery of childbirth. In the previous passage he used the fascinating image of adoption; in this passage he uses the image of childbirth. Verses 22 and 23, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as children, the redemption of our bodies." The Good News version is clearer, "For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth." Isn't that a fascinating analysis? We are living in times of childbirth, and childbirth is accompanied by suffering and pain, but the suffering is not worth comparing with the glory of a baby's birth.

Now I am treading on dangerous ground. Who am I, a mere man, to expound on childbirth, but I see the imagery as an intriguing explanation of waiting. Paul says we are waiting for the birth of the New Age, but the waiting is not passive, for a woman giving birth is not passively waiting for it to happen! She participates in the birth. She cooperates with the process. She learns how to breathe properly and I understand that proper breathing alleviates the pain. She cooperates. In other words, she helps the birth to happen; and that is how we are to wait for the New Age in Jesus Christ. We are to participate, to cooperate with the process, to let the old order of sin and death die, and to help the New Age of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God, to be born. We are not to resist the New Age, but to cooperate by concentrating, breathing, acting, pushing, so that New Age might be born.

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Don't be discouraged by a seeming lack of progress. Don't be discouraged by the problems and setbacks in your life or in society. Don't be discouraged by the snail's pace it is taking. Sometimes a birth takes a long time. There are false alarms. Eleanor made two false trips to the hospital. Sometimes the baby stops. Craig had a difficult time being born. He stopped in the middle of the delivery, and we waited! We waited for two long hours while he waited to be born! Now he's in such a hurry, he won't even wait for the benediction! Were you here last week? He turned the organ loose before I had a chance to open my mouth--unintentionally, of course! Yes, we waited for Craig to be born, but he was well worth the wait. As we wait for the kingdom of God to come, there are setbacks, problems, pain, and disappointment; but the result--the goal--is well worth the suffering.

Yes, the New Age is coming, but, for now, we wait. Waiting for the New Age to be born is not a passive stance, it is active. Waiting is not reactive, but proactive. Rather than merely reacting to change, responding to what happens, worrying about the social problems of the day, being dismayed by setbacks in your life; be proactive. Cause things to happen. Put the ideals of Christ into practice. Live as if the kingdom has already come. Live as if you have already received your inheritance.

Wait with expectation--with eyes ahead, seeing not just today, but tomorrow. Let the old order die. Help the New Age to be born.