

Aug. 9.

WAIT WITH PRAYER AND PATIENCE  
SIXTH IN SERIES ON "THE WAY OUT" OF THE HUMAN DILEMMA  
ROMANS 8:26-30

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The last time I was in San Francisco, I saw an elderly gentleman standing on the sidewalk with a sandwich board hanging from his shoulders. I hadn't seen such a person in years, but there he was, standing there making his witness. Painted on the board were familiar words such as, "Repent! The end is coming!" Most people ignored him; some smiled with a patronizing smile. But he is right, you know. The end is coming. We're doomed! This world is doomed! Life as we know it is doomed!

The theme of this sermon series is that the human situation, the human dilemma, under the control of sin and death, is doomed. But, according to Paul's letter to the church in Rome, there is a way out. The Holy Spirit, active and alive in our midst and in your life, is leading the way out. We wait, with a longing, a groaning, like a woman in childbirth. Last week we studied Paul's image of childbirth as an explanation of what is going on in our world. We are in the throes of childbirth. The New Age is being born; the old age, the old order, is decaying, deteriorating, dying around us. It is doomed. God is bringing a New Age where God, not sin and death, will reign.

What the New Age is like has been revealed to us through Jesus Christ. What the Holy Spirit is doing is adopting us--you and me--into God's family, says Paul. We have a new family where we are no longer loyal to sin and death, but a new family with new rites, values, and goals, where we are loyal to God. As adopted children of God, we have full rights, equal rights with Jesus who is God's natural child; but we are waiting for the inheritance. We wait, however, not passively; but like a woman in childbirth. As a woman giving birth cooperates with the process, participates by breathing, pushing and perspiring (!), so we wait for the kingdom by cooperating with God, by participating in those causes and activities which characterize the New Age.

That is a summary of previous sermons. We are now in number six, Romans 8:26-30, a profound passage, which is introduced by verse 25, "We wait...with patience." Why patience? Michel Bouttier in his fascinating book, Christianity According to Paul, reminds us that as long as we live on this earth, we are part of the human condition. We see glimpses of the future. We receive a foretaste of our inheritance. But because we do not yet experience fulfillment, communion with Christ does not enrich us, it deprives us. We believe without touching; we love without seeing; we live "in Christ" but away from Christ. So we are impoverished, we are deprived.

The closer you get to God and the more you experience the love, joy and peace of the Holy Spirit, the more you realize what you don't have, and the greater is your longing for fulfillment. Like a person waiting for the probate judge to award the inheritance, you already begin spending it in your head. You have a guarantee, but the paper work takes so long. You realize you are deprived; you are missing out; there is so much more to life than what you now have; but you must wait, perhaps anxiously, but patiently. What else can you do? Likewise, because you have received the guarantee of the Spirit, you know who is coming; you know what is coming; and you patiently wait. However, it is not a passive patience. As waiting is not a passive waiting, so patience is not an acquiescing, passive patience.



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There is an agony in waiting, a longing, a yearning, that is perhaps not only best expressed in prayer, but can only be expressed in prayer. Some people don't know how to pray; in fact, most of us don't know how to pray. We don't know the words. But you don't have to know the words; in fact, there are usually no words in prayer. The Holy Spirit provides the words. That's the beauty of the gospel, the Christian solution to the human dilemma. God not only provides the way out, the Holy Spirit leads you and even does your praying. Far below the content level of your conscious mind; far below the words, beyond human language; in the depths of your being where you agonize; deep within you where you hurt and cry; deep within you where the only language is sighing and longing; deep within you where lie the unspoken desires of your heart, the goals of your being, the cries of your spirit; there is where the Holy Spirit intercedes for you and does your praying.

People who live their lives on a superficial level have no clue about what I am saying today. But those of you who have desperately prayed for healing; you who have sat beside a loved one who lay dying; you who have anguished over a child in trouble, and you didn't know what to do; you who carry a burden for the problems of the world; you know how the Holy Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. You know what it is to wait in prayer. You know what it is to be patient.

The heartfelt prayer of the early church was "maranatha," which translated means, "Come, Lord Jesus." That is also the cry of the heart today. That is the prayer that surges within us, boils within us, so earnest, so heartfelt, so agonizing within us, that it erupts through our lips, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Pray "Come, Lord Jesus" in the immediate sense, to whatever degree Christ can come into your life within the confines of earthly existence. Pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," in the ultimate, final sense, when he will come at the end of history to establish God's reign.

This past week the world again observed the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. It was on August 6, 1945, that the atomic age was born, and we witnessed a magnitude of destruction never before experienced on this earth, at least by human initiative. I've stood in Hiroshima before the monument. I've stood on the hallowed ground; it has become a hallowed ground in the sense that it reminds us that never again can we let this happen! The world will experience peace when enough people care so deeply they agonize in their very souls. When prayers for peace are deep within us, when those prayers are accompanied by tears and sighs too deep for words, when those prayers are accompanied by committed action to banish nuclear weapons and to build a world beyond war; then peace will come.

There are many signs of hope today. The Missions Conference at Asilomar, attended by 700 persons last week, including 11 from our congregation, celebrated the monumental changes that are occurring in the Soviet Union. At a luncheon last week, sponsored by the Beyond War movement, I heard a report by Dr. Martin Helmen of Stanford who is working with a group of Russian and American scientists writing a book which will soon be released simultaneously in the United States and in the Soviet Union. The book is written to us citizens by scientists in both countries emphatically stating that war is obsolete, there is more than one viable model for an economy, the Communist sense of messiahship for the world is repudiated, and it is time to replace



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nationalism with global thinking. The news out of Russia these days is very hopeful. Much change is occurring in the Soviet Union today. Newspapers are writing world news objectively like never before. These are hopeful times. There are signs that the New Age is being born. We need to cooperate with that birth, pray for it at the deepest level of our beings, and commit ourselves to enabling actions.

Therefore, a Christian is optimistic. Nothing can defeat us. We are confident. We are optimistic. We have seen a glimpse of God's future; therefore, nothing can dissuade or discourage us. God will triumph. Jesus will come. The Holy Spirit is already at work in our lives and in the world. Paul says in verse 28, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." The King James version reads, "All things work together for good." This is an unfortunate translation for it infers that events conspire together for your good. Well, as they sing in Porgy and Bess, "it ain't necessarily so." Not everything that happens to you is necessarily in your best interests nor in accordance with God's will. The subject of the sentence, according to most of the ancient documents, is not "all things" but "God." It is not all things that work for good; it is God who works for good in all things.

Notice also in this passage that God is the initiator; not your will or your desires or your plans. You don't even know how to pray, says Paul. It is God who works for good according to God's plan, not your whims or what you think ought to happen. And God works for good with those who love him and are called according to his purpose. It is God who calls. It is God who predestines, calls, justifies and glorifies. Paul is not describing in verses 28-30 a process that Christians go through. Nor is Paul describing a process that we can put into effect. It may be hard for us who live in high-tech Silicon valley to appreciate, but the Christian life is not a process or a procedure or a formula. Your calling, justification, and glorification are acts of God, not a predictable and identifiable process. You are justified, not by your doing, but by faith, and God even provides the faith. Therefore, because God is the initiator and chief actor--and not your strength, or your faith, or your power, or your praying ability--you can have confidence. You can be optimistic.

And you can be joyful. Christians are joyful, happy people, not because we don't anguish when people are hurting, not because we are oblivious to tragedy, not because we never experience sorrow, cancer, or death, not because we are blind to the human situation. No, we are joyful because we can see the end. We can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Yes, there will be setbacks, but don't be discouraged and don't give up trying. Keep the goals high, in accordance with the kingdom of God. When a person struggles with the conflict between ideals and behavior, some modern therapists help him/her lower the expectations to be in harmony with the actions. Not so with the Christian life. Keep those expectations high. Don't lapse into complacency. Don't be satisfied with your life as you are now living it. There is no room for smugness or self-righteousness. But, also, don't languish in guilt over what you fail to do. Don't grovel in guilt over the discrepancy between what you do and what you want to do. Guilt is forgiven. You are given second chances--and more. In forgiveness you are empowered to start over or pick up where you left off.

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In spite of setbacks, in spite of discouragement, in spite of failure, we are confident and joyful, because we can see the future, and because we know who is leading. In Christ we have confidence, not in ourselves. In Nenana, Alaska, during the annual Ice Classic, people bet on what day and time the ice will break up on the Tanana River. This year 167,000 people bought \$2 tickets and placed their bets. First prize was \$155,000. But 46 people had no hope of winning. 46 people placed their money on April 31! Not quite a sure thing! Brothers and sisters, we have a sure thing. We know what's coming. We know who's coming. We wait with patience and heartfelt prayer, praying "Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus." And he will come. We are confident. It's a sure thing. Success is assured. Continued next week.