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**Pentecost VII - 2023**

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." In the name...

Dear friends, it would seem that Paul thinks that you were made for something; that amidst the monotony of a at-times lackluster job, the endless options for bad coffee, the never-ending need for more gasoline in the car, and the sobering realities of age, you were made for something.

It is accessed, here, in this passage, through sufferings of every kind—this thing that you were made for, that is. The sufferings in this passage do not seem limited to martyrdom, though it is likely included. So...this thing that you were made for, though certainly available to the martyr, is available also for those whose sufferings are common to humanity—in fact, to all of Creation. "For Creation was subjected to 'futility' IN HOPE." There is a kind of aimless and pointless suffering common to the whole world that is outright GIVEN in hope. We will deal with the Giver in a moment, but for now, Paul is claiming that there is something redemptive about the annoyances and sufferings of this life. Here's a list from my week, and I'm guessing yours is not much different: the cleanup after a public dissolution of a marriage; or how about this one: the utter futility of car repairs; the utter futility of allergies and the besetting illness of children that never ends; the utter futility of ruining the expensive propeller on someone else's boat; the utter futility of a burned breakfast; the utter futility of hurtful family members; the utter futility of dead flowers amidst the heat; the utter futility of watching someone go through financial devastation. So, this thing that you were made for is somehow opened to us through odd means—suffering.

So what is it? What are you made for? And why is its most effective portal so...often...futility???? Let me read it to you again:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup>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!' <sup>16</sup>it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>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.***

You were not finally made for pension programs. You were not finally made for taxation. You were not finally made for water bills. You were not even finally made for mere earthly happiness. You were made for glory. Glory is the essential quality of God's God-ness. When you combine the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth of God's effusive presence in this world—you get glory, and it's the kind of glory that fills the forest with serenity, the ocean with sobering reverence, the sky with soaring brightness, and the face of a

child with the image of God. It is all around you, it suffuses your life, breath, and the soaring organ music we hear today; and according to Paul, it is often most obvious to us when we suffer the futilities of this life. Let me read again:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup>for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; <sup>23</sup>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.

Three final considerations from this passage:

1. Paul very controversially says that it is God who has done this and made this arrangement. It would seem that with the introduction of sin and death, God ensures that sin and death do not have the last word with us—down to our very flesh. That God took a fallen, sin-filled world, subjected it to futility—to decay, so that shaken from the slumber of sin and death, we might be free.
2. Your freedom from decay is connected to that of Creation. Humanity plunged this world into the decay of sin; and therefore it is with humanity's redemption that the entire world is pulled out of the decay of sin. My dead flowers await with the groans of labor the redemption of humanity and the world. And the flowers didn't even do anything!
3. And therefore, Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.

At this altar, suffering's deep connection to glory could not be more obvious. Beaten to a bloody pulp and killed; ascended to panoramic glory above. Now poured out for you. HERE is suffering and glory. Suffer here with him, so that you may also be glorified with him. In the name...