

The Groaning of Creation

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Throughout the Lenten season, in the First Church Community, we have had many conversations about suffering. In religious circles, we often speak of individual suffering. This may be brought upon by hard times. Or an unfortunate event, that is beyond someone's control. This may be the loss of a loved one, or emotional or mental suffering due to personal trauma. It may be chronic pain and physical challenges. But nonetheless we have all endured our own forms of suffering. But some of us are a part of communities that are subjected to a daily reality where our bodies are policed and monitored for reasons of race, gender, sexuality, class. And due to these differences, millions of God's children have **already** been under some form of **quarantine** since birth. Forbidden from social mobility, forbidden from certain freedoms and opportunities. And Quarantined in slums with substandard housing and education, no access to food, water, or health care. Conditions which we see are human rights violations.

Now we are in period of history where the sufferings of this present time, will inevitably be shared by the entire world. We are all mortal, we are all human, we all have our own physical frailties that make us susceptible to illness. A virus knows no prejudice because a virus does not care if you are a billionaire, or a salaried worker, we are all vulnerable.

In our text, the English word "revealing" translates as "apocalupsis", the Greek meaning of apocalypse does not necessarily mean end times, it means "uncovering" or "unveiling". This crisis is simply unveiling the truth that although we all share new physical vulnerabilities, the system we live in is already a parasitic or viral agent that has been feeding off the poor and socially vulnerable for centuries.

The socially vulnerable are made to be so because of a man-made merit system that dictates who is worthy of being treated as human. Millions are treated as expendable while the rich and privileged prioritize profit over people. This current crisis has exposed deep rooted flaws in the system that exploits us, but that we also depend upon. We know millions of Americans have been laid off, many of whom are a paycheck or two away from homelessness. While others in the service industry are forced to go to work despite the risks.

A friend of mine, who was recently laid off and now is struggling to secure housing, asked me how is God playing a role in this crisis? At the time I didn't know, but in our text the Apostle Paul draws attention to what he calls the "futility of creation". He acknowledges the fact that things are absurd and corrupt here on Earth. There are things that seem senseless in our world, like the system we live in, inequality, social crises, pandemics, poverty in a time of material abundance. Sometimes we as Gods children who are an extension of creation, are senseless and futile because we allow the corruption to continue. Even though we have the means and knowledge to change it. This is why God groans, this is why God weeps, because her creation would rather oppress and exploit than live into their true nature of love and harmony. But in this senselessness of our world, the Word says there is a divine hope that "creation will be set free from its bondage to corruption, so that freedom for the children of God will be obtained." This crisis has exposed the fractured and corrupt system that many fight desperately to defend. Which means that the Spirit of God is groaning and hoping that creation, which is human society itself, can be free from bondage and its infatuation with corruption. Because we who are the most vulnerable of this species have been groaning since birth. So how is God playing a role? This may be our opportunity to recognize what is being unveiled, revealed, and choosing how we will respond in a way that gratifies God. We gratify God by caring for the vulnerable.

Despite the fact that it may feel like things will get worse before they get better. Scripture shows us that human societies tend to break down before they are rebuilt. We cannot control the pandemic, but we can control how

we respond to it. Let us not respond with a permanent spirit of fear or anxiety, because God can still work through times of crisis. In fact, the Bible is a compilation of crisis stories. Because it is in crisis where we are forced to discover what God's will is for society. In crisis, God's love, and grace is available as God stands there with open arms and is eager to embrace us, to calm our worries, to console us when we are afraid, to make a way out of no way; and to remind us that God's will is always justice. Psalm 91 says God can deliver us from the deadly pestilence, under her wings we will find refuge, we will not fear the terror of the night, or the wicked, or evil, or plague, because we have made the Lord our dwelling place. We do not know when creation will be set free from corruption. My friend and I discussed how things may look in 5 months, or a year?" But I said to him the truth is that there is no way to know what lies ahead, therefore we must resort to hoping for what we do not see. Because the text also says that in "Hope we are saved. But hope that is seen is not hope, but we hope for **what we do not see.**" Although we cannot see it, we as God's creation have a duty to hope for a future without corruption, and to hope for a future where we can be healed not only from the threat of a virus itself, but from the societal corruption that the virus is exposing. So, friends, stay attentive to what is being unveiled during this time. Stay hopeful and not fearful, because in doing so we fulfill our duty as children of God. God reminds us that perfect love casts out fear. Now we must seek to gratify God despite the sufferings of the present time. We do this by maintaining hope (even if hopelessness is enticing) and looking forward to the day when we can pick up the pieces and build the world that God calls us to build.



