

Trinity 4 2020

Ro. 8: 18-23

Luke 6: 36-42

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen+

Today we have come again to worship. There are a vast number of elements to our actions; praying, singing, listening, kneeling, confessing, receiving, but each of those is merely a part of one central attitude—to proclaim the worth of God. Worship means that we are saying God alone is really worthy of all our adoration and He alone is the source of our ultimate hope. All this occurs as we live in the midst of a myriad of other voices; voices economic, political, social, scientific, which make claims and bring challenges from the world of which we are a part. Some of those convey little in the way of honesty, or long-term and lasting hope. This has become more and more apparent as we encounter a time where normal life is in disarray. So, we are called on this day to have **binocular vision**. We are asked to see our existence as it really is in this moment without rose colored glasses or illusory thinking, and we are being given a glance of our future as God has prepared, sees, and promises. Two things are present all at once. We have to decide which vision holds fast and lives within us.

One of the more comedic characters in American cinema over the past couple of decades is found in the figure of Clark W. Griswold, played by the actor, Chevy Chase. It all started with the movie, *Vacation*, but several serials have come along as well. My personal favorite is *Christmas Vacation*. In it Clark, who is ever foolishly optimistic, naïve, and yet good hearted, wants to have the perfect family Christmas celebration. Against all advice from his spouse, and complete resistance from his children, he decides it is time for him to host his parents and in-laws for a week-long celebration. As the observer quickly discovers, these two sides of the family are not particularly fond of one another, and to add to the challenge Clark’s ne’r-do-well cousin-in-law, Eddie, shows up with his crew, in a beat-up RV and with no money, to spend a month. The chief premise of the film can be summed up in Murphy’s Law—if anything can go wrong, it will, and at the worst possible moment. Clark decorates the house with 10,000 lights which will not come on. The turkey for dinner is inedible, Eddie’s pet Rottweiler destroys the place chasing a squirrel, and his uncle, Lewis, attempting to light a cigar sets the tree on fire. Finally, Clark’s wife simply says, “I think it is best that everyone just go home before things get any worse”. His response is, “Worse, How can things get any worse? Look around you Ellen. We’re at the threshold of Hell.” Comedic and yet poignant.

St. Paul writes to the Romans, “I am convinced that the sufferings of this present moment are not worthy to be compared to the glory to be revealed to (and in) us”. IN that one phrase he acknowledges the binocular vision we as Christians have, and he first looks clearly at the darker side of life—suffering. (pathemata). “The whole creation together groans in travail waiting...” It is the simple recognition that life is not what we want it to be or longingly wish it to be. This true not only for us as humans, but even the rest of creation is fractured in many ways, and shares in our Fall into Sin. The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that all things are in the process of

decay. We see weather patterns that are beyond our management and leave destruction in their wake. Genetic abnormalities leave us with conditions that have lifelong implications and suffering. And now, in this day and age of medical advances and the eradication of so many diseases, the whole world has been caught off guard and unawares by a virus that seems not possible in a time of such development. Paul’s words, “Creation groans” should not be a puzzle to any of us!

I think one of the great challenges to all of us now is the dilemma of finding trust; trust our leaders, in our neighbors, trust in our relationships. Consider for a moment the way in which language and words have come to be used in our time. We communicate with one another in deep ways through what we say. Yet in our era words are spun and manipulated with ease. Rather than reveal and uncover it is often true that they are calculated and used to, conceal, distort, and mislead leaving disillusionment and hurt behind. Many people reject the very idea of God on the basis of viewing the condition of the creation. They and we, too, might well agree with Clark Griswold when he says, “Look around you...” The simple truth in all this is the voices of suffering and difficulty in the world leave an impression on us, and if they become the **prime lens** by which we see life, we are seeing only half of what Paul is painting, and we are allowing the brokenness to control our hope.

If it is true that words confound and disappoint, it is also true that if the right words are spoken then the whole terrain of our vision and lives can be cleansed and redeemed. The antidote to fatalism, which is rampant in our time, is found in the other lens of Paul’s binoculars. This passage begins with the words, “I reckon or I consider the sufferings of this present moment are not worthy of being compared to the glory that will be revealed in us”. That little word, reckon, is very interesting and revealing. It comes from the root word that means literally to register something that can be counted on, as in bookkeeping; something that is actual. He leads us to look at the action of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus as a sign and promise of our future. Paul is reminding all of us that as Christians we already belong to Christ, and that what He has been through on our behalf has been given to us, except in a limited way for now. Its completion is still unfolding. We are now in a time of hopeful waiting for full adoption, and nothing in this penultimate time can rob us of that. We may refuse to see it; we may be blinded for a time by our struggles, but they cannot claim what God has already made His own.

Hope is the key word here, and it is not hope as in wishful thinking or taking on a Pollyanna view of life. Unfortunately our pericope today leaves out the last 2 verses: “For in this hope were saved”—Paul shows us what has already been accomplished. We wait on its fulfillment. We do this all the time in life. We await someone to visit, and we cannot see or know the time of the arrival of their plane flight. We cannot speed up what is underway, but it is happening all the same, and we look forward to it. Hope is seeing the world and our lives from the perspective of God. No, it is not always or even generally easy, but without it we find it hard to go on. Hope is

not found in things we can control, but in what is not seen immediately. G. K. Chesterton put it this way.

"As long as matters are really hopeful,
hope is a mere flattery or platitude;
it is only when everything is hopeless
that hope begins to be a strength at all.

Like all the Christian virtues,
it is as unreasonable as it is indispensable."

I do not know how many of you have ever been to St. Paul's Cathedral in London, but it is astounding. In 1666 a great fire broke out in the bakery of King Charles. It raged for 4 days and destroyed 80% of London, including the cathedral. Rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren it was finally

completed with the dome in 1705. You can, if you are hale and hearty take over 1,100 steps to the top of the third dome. The view is breath taking. You can see the Thames as it twists and turns, most of the boroughs of the city, and even into the countryside. The effect is nearly indescribable. One of things that occurred to me was the fact that only from this vantage point was such an image possible. Nothing changes in London when you are at street level, but once you know the truth nothing looks quite the same either. I think that is how hope impacts us. Knowing God's care and saving activity on our behalf in Christ, we can see by means of hope. Not literally, but in the only way that really matters. We see with binocular vision. This hope is built and sustained in our worship, in our common life here, in the reception of the Sacraments, and in our openly throwing ourselves into God's merciful care. Amen+