

Series: Shalom

September 4, 2016

Title: Glory!

[Slide 1]

Text: Romans 8:18-25

Creation's Hope

Silent Spring:

[Slide 2]

Every so often someone does something that changes our world for the better. Such a thing happened on September 27, 1962 with the publication of a little book entitled Silent Spring. The book, written by biologist and environmentalist Rachel Carson, sounded a stark warning that our society's rampant use of pesticides like DDT would one day silence the song birds that greet us each summer morning.

And there was certainly cause to be alarmed. Certain pesticides, or biocides, as Carson called them, do not break down over time, but rather stay in an animal's tissue to be passed along to whatever eats it. The poison then accumulates in the next creature up the food chain. And so it goes right up to the top predator.

The effects of this bio-accumulation, or bio-magnification of DDT became disastrously clear in the impact on osprey. When DDT accumulated in ospreys, it caused them to lay eggs that were deprived of calcium, making the egg shells too thin. When the birds tried to incubate the eggs, they often crushed them with their own weight. Result: osprey populations crashed to disastrously low levels.

Needless to say, Rachel Carson's Silent Spring was not at all popular with the big chemical corporations of the time. Nonetheless, within 10 years of its publication, DDT was banned in the United States and many other countries. Not long after, osprey and eagle populations began to rebound. Today on any summer afternoon you will see osprey hunting for fish in St. Albans Bay and throughout many other parts of Lake Champlain.

All because someone decided to make a difference.

Creation's Hope:

It has always been God's plan that we be the ones who make the difference in His world. Paul was no stranger to what it felt like to live in a broken and oppressive world. All of the power structures of his world worked overtime to eradicate the very faith he preached and the little communities that he established. Like the fate of the osprey, the fate of the early church hung in the balance.

And yet in the middle of all of the hostility and uncertainty, he wrote:

[Slide 3]

Romans 8:18 NIV

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

He understood that the moment he lived in was *pregnant* with an amazing opportunity: the chance to unleash the transforming power of God right in the middle of the mess.

This was no time to whine or feel sorry for himself. This was no time for discouragement or quitting. This messy, unpredictable, unstable, disordered time was precisely the moment God Himself had chosen to begin the *re-creation* of His world. Just as God had stepped into the *disorder and chaos* of the world in order to create an ordered and thriving place for us to live, now God was doing it all over again – right down to the creating of a brand new humanity.

God had chosen this time to begin the revealing of His glory in people like you and me. And what would that glory look like? N.T. Wright defines it as:

[Slide 4]

...the splendid reign over the world for which the human race was designed from the beginning, and the splendid form of human existence that will be appropriate for that role...lost through sin, but regained through the Messiah in his resurrection. (Wright, Romans, p. 595)

In the middle of the mess:

Like Paul, we too live in the middle of the mess. Every one of us has faced our own personal version of a "Silent Spring." Every one of us has felt the effects of the spiritual toxins in our world. Every one of us knows down deep inside that we are also responsible for some part of the damage to our world.

But Paul reminds us that he has "done the math" and our present sufferings, whatever they may be, are not the final reality.

So what will it take for us to be able to do the math that Paul did in his sufferings? When life's ledger seems to be in the red in every department, how can we celebrate God's *Shalom*?

Great Expectations

Creation waits:

The first reason for seeing past our difficulties lies right within the Creation itself:

[Slide 5]

Romans 8:19 NIV

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

Think of it: the rest of the created order understands something that we find hard to grasp. The world around us was *made* to function properly. Ospreys are programmed to fly north, build those astounding nests in the tops of dead trees or even on the cross ties of power poles, and raise a new generation. They didn't stop trying even when an unseen and unknown poison laced every bite of food they caught. They didn't stop laying eggs even when the shells were so thin that the eggs collapsed under the parent's weight.

And when the humans finally stopped poisoning the food chain, the osprey population surged. That's what *eager expectation* looks like. God's good and wonderful world is trying to tell us something!

As Wright puts it:

[Slide 6]

The whole creation – sun, moon, sea, sky, birds, animals, plants – is longing for the time when God’s people will be revealed as God’s glorious human agents, set in authority over the world.” (Wright, p. 596)

Exodus:

But in order for all of that to happen there has to be a New Exodus:

[Slide 7]

Romans 8:20-21 NIV

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

This New Exodus will only happen when *we the one part of the Creation that bears God’s image and likeness* are fully restored to the role and purpose that God intended for us. Creation will be liberated from decay because we have at last become what we were meant to be.

Great Expectations:

Paul explains that what looks like no more than a suffering and oppressed Creation is *actually* the birthing of God’s New Creation:

[Slide 8]

Romans 8:22 NIV

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

He goes on to say that we – as followers of Jesus – do much the same thing:

Romans 8:23 NIV

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

The New Exodus began with Jesus conquering Death. But we're still in that in-between place: part of us has been brought to Eternal Life through God's Holy Spirit living in us; part of us is still captive to this fallen world. As Wright says:

We ourselves have come out of "Egypt," but our body, which still needs to have its deeds put to death, is still awaiting redemption from the slave market.

[Slide 9]

The Christian in the present time is but a pale shadow of his or her future self. (Wright, p. 598).

What began with Jesus is our future. He is our destiny. And that changes all the calculations between suffering and glory.

Glory

The Bottom of the U:

The story of God and His world is shaped like a "U." It begins with God's good and perfect Creation. It descends into the mess we've made of the world. But then it rises again to God's promised New Creation.

The Creator Himself promises:

[Slide 10]

Isaiah 65:17 NIV

"See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."

The path to the new heavens and new earth begins at the Bottom of the "U." It is there that we realize that only God is Creator and Restorer of His world. It is there that we are challenged to do the math that Paul did – calculating the losses of suffering against the infinite gain of Eternal Life.

It was there that Jesus – dying on the Cross for all of the brokenness and sin of the entire human race – declared: "It is finished." The old, tired addition of sins had been finally summed up. There would be no more adding to that side of the ledger. "It is finished" means "Paid in Full."

And it from the Bottom of the "U," Death itself, that Jesus rose again: the very first human of God's New Creation.

Hope:

Rachel Carson never lived long enough to see thousands of ospreys snatching fish out of St. Albans Bay or a thousand other waterways. She never knew a world free of DDT. She died 2 years after the publication of Silent Spring. But she died knowing that she had helped start a transformation.

Paul tells us that we were "saved in hope" (Romans 8:24). The battle is already won. Jesus defeated Death in Death's own house. His victory is our victory. When Death comes calling for us, it will run straight into King Jesus.

Meanwhile, we have work to do: Paul calls it "eager expectation with patience"! We're here to carry forward God's good work to restore people and His world. We won't finish the work in this lifetime, but we give it a good start, thanks to His Spirit working inside us.

Glory:

[Slide 11]

It's 4:00 in the afternoon and an osprey is on the prowl. It flies 60' above the water with long powerful strokes. Then suddenly it hovers in one place, flaps a couple of times and plunges straight down into the water. At the last minute it turns feet-first. For an instant it's totally out of sight, but then comes a grand flapping of double-jointed wings, and the bird rises out of the water with a freshly caught fish in its talons. Glorious!

In many ways this moment is brought to you by a woman who wrote a book over 50 years ago. When she put pen to paper her world was awash in DDT. The ospreys were headed toward extinction, along with any number of other species. The big chemical corporation unleashed their biggest guns to shut her down. She herself was battling terminal breast cancer. But she dared to *hope*. Glorious!

So what about you? How are you going to do the math when it comes to suffering versus the coming glory God has for you? What is God calling you to do *right now* when it seems like you are at the very Bottom of the "U"?

Could it be that this is a moment to be seized as the first move in some part of God's New Creation?