

“Cosmic Hope”

Romans 8:18-27 (Text: 1:17)

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I’m always captivated in the Center Mall by the Vortex Coin drops. I think it’s fascinating to watch the coin go round and round and round. But of course, sometimes when you’re watching the coin go around, something knocks it off course and its whole path is altered. What was a seemingly perfect circle is now misshapen. It’s knocked off its axis and its whole path has been changed.

This morning’s text tells us that this is the story of our world.

It’s the broad story of Scripture that we as Reformed believers affirm, that story of creation-fall-redemption-new creation.

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the world. Humanity’s rejection of God means that the relationship between God and humanity is not as it should be, the relationships within humanity are not as they should be, and the relationship between humanity and God’s good creation is not as it should be.

And so, our Reformed tradition affirms that in the redemption of Jesus Christ and in the New Creation which we anticipate, *all* things are being made right. If we are to be a church that preaches the Gospel, the Good News, that Good News isn’t *just* that our relationship with God has been repaired, that we have forgiveness and salvation for our sins through Jesus Christ. But we must also recognize that the redemption of Jesus Christ and the hope of the New Creation mean that our relationship with one another can be restored and our relationship with God’s creation can be restored.

It's that third one, our relationship with God's creation, that is the one of the foci of today's text. But notice that Paul grounds the reality of creation crookedness in our future hope. He moves from the glory that will be revealed in us to the creation that waits in eager expectation for God's people to be made right. In verse 22, we learn that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth. Creation itself is waiting for us to be restored.

There's beautiful design to God's creation. I suspect that we need to reframe how we think about things like natural disasters. As a classicist I think of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A.D., burying Pompeii and

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Herculaneum and leaving them largely intact. If you ever visit Pompeii or look at pictures in art history books, inevitably you also see the plaster casts of people who were buried under the

ash of the erupting volcano. The ash was compressed, people were buried and as they decayed they left gaps in the ground which were filled with plaster when they excavated the site. So we have these plaster molds of parents huddled around their children, of dogs cowering in the corner. To visit Pompeii or Herculaneum is to be reminded of the powerful force of nature and the death and destruction that nature can bring.

And yet, volcanic activity isn't bad in and of itself. In fact, volcanic activity is necessary for the renewing of God's creation. Volcanic activity helps new life to come forth. So what if the problem isn't the volcano, what if the problem is us? God's creation is created to be good, to bring about flourishing. In Romans 8, we see that the creation is subjected to frustration so that it can eventually be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's new creation.

We see signs all around us of how God's creation has been designed for flourishing. We see beautiful symbiotic relationships of clownfish and anemones, for instance. Think of Finding Nemo. The clownfish swim into the

anemone, providing protection for the clownfish. In turn, the clownfish keeps the anemone clean and provides nutritious waste. Yet, coral reefs are dying at an unprecedented rate. The creation is subjected to frustration.

All creation sings God's praise but it is we who interfere. God's creation is in bondage and our call as those who are living in that redemption story is to help all creation flourish.

Now here's an interesting thing about what it means for creation to flourish. I remember a conversation one

time with a friend whose grandfather was a farmer. He said, "If

I asked my grandfather what it meant for him to take care of

his animals, my grandfather would have said that his animals

were very well taken care of. They were provided feed so they

could grow big and fat, they were provided shelter so they wouldn't be harmed, they were given enough space

to move at least a little bit, they were kept perfectly comfortable." Then my friend said, "I happen to think that

what it means that we should care for creation is that we should help those animals flourish as those animals."

My friend didn't agree with his grandfather's understanding of caring for those animals. Two very different

paradigms for what it means to be part of that redemptive framework for all creation to flourish.

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But here's the problem: it seems like we have a hard time even allowing for multiple perspectives to coexist anymore.

As I prepared this sermon, I found myself realizing that there are probably some here at Covenant who, after reading the Scripture passage, thought, "Oh no, here comes another liberal sermon about creation care." Maybe I'm wrong. But I suspect that some of us are glad to hear another sermon about our call to care for creation and some of us aren't so glad.

But my question is this: how have we as a people at all points on the political spectrum become so politicized that we automatically associate certain words and phrases with one side of the political spectrum or the other and then automatically lump people together as an amorphous block? What happens if our first impulse is to hear one another as followers of Jesus Christ instead of politically left, right, or other?

Here's the thing: caring for creation is not a red, blue, green, or otherwise issue. Some of us believe we care for creation better through more government regulation, some through less. Some of us believe that we best care

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for creation through international treaties and agreements, some of us prefer to focus on encouraging healthy individual habits. But that's not the point of the sermon. I'm not advocating for a policy platform. I'm not arguing that one particular way of responding to

care for God's creation is better or worse. That's not my place, it's not what I know. But it is my job as a pastor to remind us that joining the work of the cosmic hope of the Gospel does matter. That God's redemption story is about more than just our individual salvation but that it also has to do with our reconciliation with one another and our reconciliation with God's creation.

We need to see beyond the way that our world has politicized these issues and divided us from one another. Social justice is a Gospel issue. We can disagree politically about how best to accomplish that. But it's part of God's work of redeeming all things that in response to the grace that we have been shown we strive to show grace to one another, to bring the redemption of Christ to bear on the way in which we interact with one another.

Caring for God's creation is a Gospel issue. We can disagree about the best way to do that politically. We can disagree about the best way to do it in our world. But it's part of our response to the grace that we have been shown that we in turn love God's creation and seek to join the redemptive work of restoring proper relationships between humanity and creation.

This brings us to our third posture in this series. When we consider our future hope, I would suggest that the cosmic scope of God's redemption moves us into a posture of diligence. I would suggest that the posture of diligence physically is a posture where we are bent over at work. Diligence means that we do something carefully, with thought. Diligence comes from the Latin word *diligo* which means "to esteem, to love, to have regard for".

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The posture of diligence says first that God's created world matters and that we as followers of Jesus Christ ought to love it. So we study it.

My last job was as a campus minister at Michigan State University (MSU) working with graduate students. MSU continues to be dominated by the sciences. Yet I can't tell you how many students I met who came through our campus ministry with similar stories:

- "I can't tell my grandpa what I'm getting my PhD in because he doesn't think that Christians should study evolutionary biology."
- "I don't talk about what I'm studying at church because Christians don't study astronomy."
- "I don't feel like I belong here because my countless hours of research in this field matter less than someone's quick Google search."

The story of Creation-Fall-Redemption-New Creation, the story of the Gospel, moves us to a posture of diligence where we want to love God's creation, where we want to know more about it, we want to study it, we want to understand it. We want to take advantage of the knowledge that our world has come to know about God's created world, for in so doing we come to a better understanding of who God is and how we related to God's world. It's why the CRC says that peer-reviewed science journals actually do tell us something about God's world. So when the overwhelming majority of climate scientists agree that the climate is changing and that it's driven by human beings and that it in turn has an outsized impact on the global poor, we have a responsibility to respond and to join in God's redemptive work. It's one of the reasons we celebrate God's faithfulness to our educational institutions that have borne faithful witness for generations to this posture of diligence.

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The cosmic scope of God's redemption moves us into a posture of diligence where we love God's world and want to know more about it, but it also means that we have a posture of diligence. It means that we are careful and persistent in our care for the world. It's part of responding to a creation longing to be made

right. It's why we serve coffee out of reusable mugs and why we serve communion out of glass communion cups. It means that in our daily work, we seek to repair the broken relationship with God's creation. And so we ask important questions: how do we grow food in such a way that brings forth the flourishing of God's creation? How do we design our buildings not just to withstand natural disasters but to be in harmony with creation? How do we design roadways that respect the migration patterns of wandering herds of animals? The list goes on and on down to every facet of our lives. That's why we need Christians at work in every sphere of human activity, bringing the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in all of creation to bear in our daily lives.

The cosmic scope of God’s redemption moves us into a posture of diligence where we love God’s creation, where we care for it, and where we wait with creation. Paul links the groaning of creation with our own experience of waiting for God’s new creation (verses 22-23).

We and God’s creation are in the same place. This isn’t a triumphalist message that we can go out and fix all the world’s problems on our own. Rather this is the story of grace. Brothers and sisters, all of us need the grace of Jesus. All of us need to be set right with God. All of us are equal at the foot of the cross. None of us can make ourselves right with God. And we don’t make ourselves right with God by fixing the other relationships that have been knocked off-kilter. We don’t make ourselves right with God by being eco-friendly. We don’t make ourselves right with God by putting recycling bins all over, even if that is a good thing to do. We don’t make ourselves right with God by beating the drum about creation care. That’s not what saves us. We are saved only by the grace and love of Jesus Christ. All of creation longs to be set right. And so, with a posture of diligence, with love for God’s creation, with care and concern, we await the day that all will be made right. Amen.

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