

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 23, 2017

Text: Romans 8:13-27

Theme: "Come, Lord Jesus!!!" A Longing Cry

You see I have a pair of crutches here. We would rather not have need of them. There were many times in the life of Leroy Schoen that he would have been glad to have used them. Leroy was one of our neighbors when I was growing up. His property bordered my uncle's property. We were a little related, I think. I believe my great grandfather, Herman Schoen, and his father, William Schoen were cousins. He was a farmer. His wife's name was Dorothy. They had a son (Bill) and a daughter (Linda).

He made a living on around 200 acres. Diversity was the norm in farming, a combination of cattle, hogs, and row crops. He was a hard worker. My dad would comment on that. My brother and I used to work for him a little when we were in high school. What set him off from other farmers in the area was that he also raised horses. He may have had a herd of 15 to 20 horses. He had a large Palomino horse that he rode. He, his son, and his daughter, like to ride in parades. He was a pretty tall man and sitting in the saddle he was quite an imposing figure. He took great pride in his horses.

But this world that he knew came crashing down in the mid 1960s. That happened when a piece of farm equipment he was working on fell off the jack and came crashing down on him. He suffered a spinal injury. He

would never walk again, confined to a wheelchair. He died in 1999 at the age of 81. I think he would have loved to be able to get around on crutches, but I don't think he ever progressed that far.

Leroy needed someone to rescue him on that day the equipment fell. If he had been working alone, he may well have died. There was no way he was going to extract himself. There was no possibility that he could lift that load. He was helpless.

And so were we. We were under a load from which we could never free ourselves. It was hopeless. We were under a load of sin. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, missed His mark again and again and again. There was nothing we could do to free ourselves. We could never overcome the opposition of the devil, the world, and our flesh. No, we were not going to pull ourselves out. The fact that we were surrounded by people in the same predicament did not make our load any lighter or bring us any closer to freedom. Yes, hopeless, a lifetime of death followed by an eternity of damnation. Rescue was needed.

Rescue came for Leroy on that day under the equipment. It came by way of his father, old man Schoen as my dad likes to refer to him. He was probably in his late 70s at the time. When he was a younger man he had escaped the flood waters of the great 1937 Ohio River flood by strapping two empty gallon glass jars to his chest. He was able to get the equipment off of his son and pull him out. So it would be the hospital and treatment. Recovery would begin in hope.

We too have been rescued, a rescue by our Father. That rescue has come through His Son. No, we could never free ourselves. We were face down in the dirt, but the Son comes down, takes on our human existence, crawls down in the dirt and the mud of trouble and temptation and slides right under our loads. He lifts away every bit of it for everyone on His shoulders. He stretched out His arms willingly on the cross, hung there when He could have freed Himself. There He endured God's wrath against our sin that we may be free forever.

He does all this in His great love for us. He didn't wait for some improvement on our part, didn't say, "once you can wiggle your hand free, I'll come give you a shove." No, it was all in love, in love to the unlovely. "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) "For while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." Romans 5:10) Dirt is still close at hand. But now we are freed from its condemnation and we have been equipped to struggle against it. And we adapt.

So Leroy adapted to life apart from walking. He benefited from what medicine could offer at the time. His neighbors pitched in to help. They helped build a ramp to the front door of his house. My father designed and fit together for him a bar assembly from pipe to allow him to lift himself out of bed with his arms. He had hand controls installed on his car and pickup. He patrolled his farm on a lawn tractor. On one occasion he

took it upon himself to take his rifle in hand and deal with a pack of dogs that had been bothering his cattle. He said later that was a foolish thing to do since it was only a single shot rifle. But he would never walk again. Yes, he would have been very happy to have gotten to the point of crutching it around.

Yes, we adapt in this world of sin. A great miracle has indeed happened. Jesus gave sight to the blind, hearing for the deaf, and leaping for the lame. But we, believers in Him, have experienced an even greater miracle. We have gone from those dead in transgressions and sins to those alive in Christ. And now we can walk after him, but still we are crutching it around. Before faith slaves of sin, but now sons of God who still struggle against sin. We are not left alone in the struggle. We are fully alive in Christ now, been baptized into Him and raised with Him to walk in newness of life. We have the living waters of His word, the heavenly food of our Lord's body and blood with the bread and the wine. His Word and Sacraments are crutches of sorts. Without these gracious gifts we would be lost.

We rejoice and yet we groan. We groan as sin is always close at the had, groan as we do the evil we would not and did not do the good. We cry, "Abba, Father," and He hears. He provides. As we cry we know it's not just about us for we have been reborn to serve those around us. As we do, their needs are met and we point them to the source of serving. Yet, we groan for the time of no more groaning.

What about Leroy, did he groan? I was not around him that much to know. The times I was around him, he never complained. But maybe his wife Dorothy could have shared a thing or two. Maybe he groaned to get up on that big Palomino horse once more, longed to be high and proud in the saddle.

Today we see all creation is groaning, creation groans to be released from the bondage of decay of sin. Do we forget how far reaching the effects of sin? All creation has been subjected to futility (vs 20), all creation is dying (vs 20, 21). Yet creation moans in hope, groans in the pains of childbirth, awaiting the time of rebirth into the new heavens and new earth. Creation was vastly different before the fall. It was not a place of eat or be eaten. It was peace, life, harmony, no thorns or thistles. We think of the beauty and wonder of creation now. What was it like before? Creation groans to be delivered from its own body of death.

So we long, cry, “Come, Lord Jesus,” we who Paul describes, baptized believers, as having the firstfruits of the Spirit. We groan inwardly as we await the day of the redemption of our bodies. We long for the place and time of no more tears and sorrow, no sin, the time of being in the light of the Lord. We are now, fully God’s children, but here and now we are crutching it, limping it along waiting for what we will be.

And even as we groan and creation groans there is another groaning going on that is truly amazing. “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses (in which we groan). For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for

words.” (vs 26) It could be translated “wordless” groaning, communication beyond human words. “He who searches the heart knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” (vs 27) The Father doesn’t need words. He knows the mind of the Spirit. Again, this is truly amazing. There is communication within the Godhead on our behalf. God is speaking God to God to help us in our groaning.

Yes, we groan, “Come, Lord Jesus!” “For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” (2 Corinthians 5:4)

Our Lord who is now risen and rules and reigns above continues to sustain us here below. “Be if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it in patience.” (vs 25) We bear up under constantly looking to the One who has lifted the crushing burden of sin from us. One day we, believers, go to Him. Was that the freeing day for Leroy Schoen? I don’t have a lot of hope there. Leroy was a strong and determined man, but a man of faith, no, not that I know of, not a part of his life. Did someone bring him that life giving message before the end? I don’t know. Who is that person we can bring that life giving message to?

Yes, for the child of God there is that time of going to Him. Paul writes of it in Philipians, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...My desire is to depart and be with Christ which is far better.” There in the presence of the Lord is the day that faith give way to sight. But it gets

better. The final hope is not our going to be with our Lord, no, it's His coming back. Finally hope gives way to reality. That time will be far better than even the far better day Paul speaks of. On that day no more groaning of creation, birth pangs at an end as we have the birth of the new heavens and the new earth. On that day mortal will be swallowed by the immortal the perishable by the imperishable. Our bodies will be made like His glorious body. The heavenly Jerusalem comes down. It will be the day of no crutches.

Oh how we long for that day. But we are here; the struggle is real. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12) That may raise the question of "Who?" (one we will consider further next week), "Who, can stand before this?" Our Lord has, can, and does. We take up the His full armor. We have crutches for a reason. "Let he who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12)

"Come, Lord Jesus!" We rejoice that He comes to us now to sustain us. We crutch it along with the strength He gives doing His will as we await that day. For Jesus' sake. Amen