

A Sermon by the Rev. Canon Jack Frederick Nietert on the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, July 17, 2011 at the Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

Glory Awaits

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. — Romans 8:18-25

I want to take you back this morning to Paul's letter to the Romans. Just prior to the lesson we heard today, St. Paul had been writing about the glory of adoption into the family of God. And then, after the thought of glory, he comes back to the troubled state of the world. He writes a great picture; he writes with a poet's vision.

He sees creation itself—the whole created world, all nature—waiting for the glory that shall be. He says creation is in bondage to decay. The world is a world where beauty fades and loveliness decays says William Barclay the New Testament scholar. The world is a dying world, but the world is waiting for its liberation.

When Paul was painting this picture, he was working with ideas that any Jew would recognize and understand. Paul talked of this present age and of the glory that will be revealed. Jewish thought divided time into two sections: The present age and the age to come. The present age is subject to sin, death and decay. Someday there would come the day of the Lord. It would be a day of judgment when the world would be shaken to its foundations...and shattered. But out of this would come a new world. In Isaiah 65 there is a message of great hope, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth."

The dream was precious to the Jews and Paul new that. In his letter to the Romans he endows creation with a consciousness. When God created the heavens and the earth it was immediately pronounced "very good." But when humans rebelled against God, **all** of creation rebelled. Disorder, confusion and conflict entered the world. Fire and water, stone and soil, breeze and sunshine are useful and often beautiful; but, forest fire and flood, earthquake and erosion, hurricane and draught tear the earth apart and leave scars everywhere. Perhaps these are signs of nature's groaning. We think of hurricanes and other violent acts of nature as an interruption in the way things ought to be. In God's plan, they may serve important natural functions. We in our finite ways perhaps can best interpret these acts as nature's groaning. But then it's human groaning as well, human longing, yearning. In this life we have but a foretaste—a first installment of the glory that shall be—of full adoption into the family of God.

