

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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April 12th, 2026

Sermon Title: Creation Groans

Sermon Text: Romans 8:18-23

Rom. 8:18 ¶ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Rom. 8:19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Rom. 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope

Rom. 8:21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Rom. 8:22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Rom. 8:23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Main Point: Our future glory is so certain and so expansive that it promises not only our own redemption but the total restoration of us and the cosmos.

Outline:

1. The Good Household of Creation
2. The Groaning of Creation
3. The Restoration of the Cosmos

Introduction

What will happen when Christ returns? And who is excited about it? Well, I think as Christians we are excited about it. (I hope we are!) I mean, there's nothing more significant or joyful than to think of that day. This is why the book of Revelation ends with those words: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

But what if I told you that it's not just you and me? That actually *all* of creation – not just us, but this world, this universe on a much larger scale – that *it* is eagerly awaiting the return of Christ, as well? Well you might think to yourself, "I don't know what it means for the created order – the universe – to want something, let alone to look forward to the return of Christ. After all, the universe doesn't have a brain." And I suppose you would be right.

But here's another question: why would creation even groan in the first place like Paul says here? Isn't the universe just a bunch of inanimate objects and animals? Well yes, and maybe that's what makes this statement by Paul something we need to dive into. Because I think Scripture gives us a more robust view of creation than just "this is all stuff taking up space." Instead, we should really see ourselves as fellow creatures alongside of creation, and if our fellow creation groans along with us as it looks forward to the return of Christ, I want to know more about it. (And especially if it's important enough for Paul to bring it up.)

And so let's explore this text with three points. Our first point is "The Good Household of Creation." I want us to have a biblical perspective on the physical world and our relationship to it as human beings. Our second point is "The Groaning of Creation." I want us to know what it means that creation groans, and why. And then third, "The Restoration of the Cosmos." And there we're going to talk about just what it is about the return of Christ that the creation specifically looks forward to. What will happen to this world when he returns?

I have to tell you, I'm not an environmentalist. I'll say a bit about the difference between the Christian stewardship and what we might call the environmental movement in a bit. But as I worked on this sermon I did feel a bit challenged to think well about creation and maybe some of the ways I probably have too low of a regard for it. I do hope that maybe there will be something in here to challenge

all of us to think better about the world we live in and the groaning that Paul says it does.

1. The Good Household of Creation

First, I want us to think well about the good household of creation. What do I mean by this?

Well first let's begin by recognizing that two weeks ago we focused on Christian suffering. And Paul reminded us that on the scales, our suffering doesn't even remotely compare to the good that's coming when Christ returns and we experience our own glorification in Christ. There is something amazing coming on the horizon that makes all of our suffering seem so small by comparison. And that's what Paul was saying.

But it's not like God *only* sees and cares about this one part of creation – humanity. Instead, Paul is building up just how much expectation there is by personifying sub-human nature (all the rest of the cosmos that isn't humanity) as if it was also a person who also has hopes and dreams and sufferings of its own. This doesn't mean that nature actually thinks, or that it is made in the image of God in the way that humanity is. But it does mean that God hasn't forgotten it, and he has a regard for the world – maybe more than we might realize. The created order is a fellow-sufferer with sinners in one sense.

So let's think a moment about creation – specifically what we might call “the natural world” and think about what it is. I want to say three basic things about creation and our relationship to it. This is very basic, but it sets the stage for the rest of these verses this morning.

The first is this: we know that Creation is good. The world was created good by God. Man and woman were placed in the garden to tend it, to care for it, and to protect it from evil.

The second thing we need to remember is that this physical world was designed to be a "fitting instrument for accomplishing excellent works". We should value nature and creation because it is the theater where God's glory is meant to be displayed and the environment where we were meant to flourish in. In other

words, in the physical world there remains an echo of eden. We see a tree, and we're reminded of the garden we came from. We see grass and flowers and rivers, and we think of the garden and the tree at the end of Revelation – the destination we're moving toward. When God commanded his temple to be built, he commanded that there be trees and plants and fruits decorating the walls of the temple. All of creation in other words speaks of God's glory, and even of the glory that he still hasn't yet revealed.

The third thing I want to say is that we are meant to live in accord with nature, in accord with the world, because even the world is a type of revelation of God. It shows us what our maker is like. He's good. He provides. He loves beautiful things. He makes things beautiful, in a sense for their own sake. And that means that while the world was made for us, we're also meant to use the world according to God's ordering rather than following "carnal" impulses to exploit it for selfish ends. There is a right ordering to this world, but there's also a such thing as a wrong ordering and a misuse. And that takes us to our second point.

2. The Groaning of Creation

Second, let's consider what Paul says creation is doing. He says it is groaning.

First in verse 19 he says that creation waits. But the question is why? Well whatever creation needs or wants, it doesn't have it yet. According to verse 20, Paul says that creation was "subjected to futility."

Paul says in verse 21 that creation is in "bondage to corruption."

Then in verse 22 he says that "the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."

So this is not just a passing thing. Paul really leans on this: we are not the only sufferers in creation. This... world around us has been affected by the fall.

As a child, I remember being excited because there was a bird building a nest in our yard. But I remember being very sad when I saw the next day that the nest had been blown out of the tree, and there were little eggs with tiny birds inside that

had broken, and the baby birds had died. We've all seen these sort of things and they preach to us that creation is groaning.

In Genesis 3, part of the creation was that this good world began to push back on mankind. The ground still feeds us, but now there is suffering and thorns and thistles.

Now there is pain in the world, and the world has things in it that cause friction and suffering. There are tornados and monsoons. There are earthquakes and volcanoes that can level entire civilizations. There are floods and landslides.

But the creation is also damaged simply by us in our own actions. I am not saying that industrialization hasn't been good for mankind or that technology hasn't made our lives better in some ways. But all of those things come at a cost. There's always a trade off. We really do pollute the world as we run our refineries, as we strip mine the lands, and we pollute the seas that God has given to us. In the years prior to the depression, people in the Midwest recklessly plowed the land, refusing to let it sit fallow until ultimately their poor farming techniques resulted in the dust bowl. I am not saying farming or industrialization should be stopped, but I'm saying that even by existing and seeking to preserve ourselves, creation does pay a price for that. It's not just us who suffer, but the creation does, too.

And what can make this so egregious is that Adam was placed as the head of the physical world. Adam was made the steward and caretaker of the garden. Adam bore the creator's image. We're meant to be God's representatives over this world. Mankind is the head of the household of creation.

And so why is our destruction of the world around us so egregious? Because we are the head of the household that is the created order, this order was given to provide for us, but because of our actions there's a sense in which creation now pushes back against us, against its original design.

And just so I'm not misunderstood as attacking industrialization or large scale farming, which has made food so affordable for most people on this planet, which has made housing something for most people is plentiful and available, and has made things as essential as clothing incredibly affordable...

We still need to acknowledge the price that comes with those things.

The world groans because humanity is the head of the household, but a head of the household who uses and abuses the members of the household causes great pain and suffering, and it's something to be mourned. And when we see that disregard in ourselves, we should mourn too. And I'm very guilty of that as much as anyone.

So what I want us to see is that when we do destructive things, the world convulses. Reefs pull back and turn grey. Lands that were lush and green and beautiful become large empty craters. Bombs drop and turn forests into blackened toothpicks. We do these things to the world, and we can't always blame tornadoes or monsoons or earthquakes when that happens.

J.R.R. Tolkien, who had lived through the first world war had a particular hatred for this stripping and exploiting of the natural world, and turning it into unfeeling steel and concrete and glass. This is why he loved the Hobbits so much and hated Isengard so much. I cannot help but feel that much of his time in the trenches, subjected to mechanized and industrial mass slaughter had that formative impact on him. He experienced the mud, the barbed wire, and the "No Man's Land" where nature had been utterly obliterated by industrialized artillery, and even mankind seemed to have lost himself.

The reality is, the way we treat our world is a reflection of our own spiritual state. You can even think of this on a small level. I used to work with a guy whom I hope has grown and changed from back then, but almost 20 years ago I delivered furniture, and as we were going to a delivery he just rolled down the window and threw his bag of McDonalds out the window and onto this beautiful clean Kansas highway. I still think about it. I wanted to live somewhere beautiful. Now I lived in a place with garbage strewn about. I became furious with him, but the fact is, his mistreatment of the world came from a spiritual place in his own heart. He just didn't care. How he treated the world came from a spiritual place. It spoke to his heart's condition.

When Peter Martyr talked about this passage he mentioned that there is what he calls a "wonderful sympathy" between man and creation. The world reflects our own spiritual state. When we are drawn into ourselves, when we're self-absorbed, we neglect God and his glory, then we also won't particularly care what happens

to the world even though it is a revelation of God. And perhaps it is because it is a revelation of God that people often neglect and abuse it.

Humanity bears God's image, and so often people attack one another in an attempt – truly – to assault the creator. But we can't get to him and so we do the next best thing we turn on his creatures that are made in his image.

The creation similarly bears the creator's mark. And is it really no surprise that when we have hard hearts toward God we also have hard hearts toward the world he made, which is a revelation and a gift of the creator?

Our alienation from nature—viewing it merely as something to be exploited—is part of the "bondage of corruption" that Paul says we experience. Again, Peter Martyr argues that creation suffers a "great wrong" when it is forced to serve the ungodly or those who don't direct their use of this world toward the glory of God.

And so I hope now you can see that it makes sense, what Paul says here: this world groans along with us. The world is not right, and we can feel it all around us.

3. The Restoration of the Cosmos

Third this morning, Paul says that creation is waiting for something precious: it is waiting for its coming restoration.

See it here from Paul. Verse 19: "the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." Verse 21: "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption..." It will "obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

Notice all of his hopeful forward, looking language here.

So it is waiting for something that actually is coming. But what I want you to see is, the renewal that creation is waiting for is not a *human* project; it is divine intervention that creation is waiting for.

The thing this world is waiting for is a sovereign act of God, centered on the return of Christ, where the very substance of our world is refined and elevated. Why? Because the "revealing of the sons of God" is when this happens.

The time when the children of God are glorified is when this happens. And that is something that we do not and cannot control. In fact, we don't even know the day or hour that it will happen. But we know that it is coming and it will happen.

And all of this means that there is a difference between being an environmentalist and being a Christian steward of the world: while environmentalism often seeks to preserve nature as a self-contained end, stewardship recognizes the cosmos as God's "household," created as a "fitting instrument" for His glory. Unlike environmentalists, who believe that this world is all we have, Christians are different because fundamentally we do not act out of fear of collapse, but from a "debt" to the Spirit. We act from an obligation to use the world according to "God's ordering." Unlike secular efforts to fix a dying planet, we are Christians. And so we wait with patience for a "transformative break" where God—not man—will "refine" and "restore" this groaning creation into an incorruptible home.

Let me show you this from Scripture.

There are three passages I want to briefly look at to sort of fill this out, so you can get a bigger picture of what I think Paul is alluding to in our passage today when he talks about this "revealing" that is eventually coming.

The first place is in 2 Peter 3:10 and 13. Listen to what Peter says:

"The heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved... But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:10, 13)

According to Peter, the transformation of the world is a cataclysmic act of God described as a type of final conflagration. This is not the end of the physical world, but is instead its purification. Just like gold and silver are melted in a furnace to become purer, the world will be refined by God's fire, not annihilated into nothingness. This cataclysmic "break" that is coming is the moment when the elements lose the qualities suited to our current "corruptible bodies" and take on new ones suited to our "immortal and glorified bodies".

The next place I want you to gain some insight about this coming change that God will bring is Ephesians 1:10 where Paul says that God set forth Christ

“To unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Ephesians 1:10)

My point in mentioning this verse is that this cataclysmic revelation and changing of the world, the freeing of creation from its bondage... is inextricably linked to the person of Jesus Christ. And this is because Christ is the "Head" in whom all things are "summed up". The break between the current age and the next is bridged by Christ's return, when he reclaims his "household". Since Christ has already reconciled us through the blood of his cross, his return marks the extension of that peace to the physical heavens and earth. In that moment, not just us but the whole world will be blessed and set free.

Now, the last verse I want you to notice is Psalm 102:25, where the Psalmist is recounting God's work of creation, and he says this:

“Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands... like a robe you will change them, and they will pass away.”

So here the Psalmist is talking about the beginning and “end” of the created order. The bookends of the world as we know it. God made it, and one day it will “pass away.” But notice how it's God who will change the world like a garment, not us.

The transformation that creation needs is a sovereign "change of clothes" for the universe. Peter Martyr, when he reflects on this uses the [illustration of a king's son]. He says, when the son is inaugurated, the king dresses the servants and the household in splendor to match the son's glory. God will "change them like a garment," and they will be changed. This tells us that creation's renewal is a gift bestowed upon it by the Father at the moment he openly displays his resurrected children.

So what Scripture tells us is that we live through trials *with* creation. We don't build some sort of utopian New Earth through our own social or industrial progress; rather, we live as faithful witnesses, we love God and his creation, but we ultimately have to powerlessly wait with "patience" for the God who has justified us to also glorify the world we inhabit.

What does that mean? I think in part it does mean that we should care about the world and the environmental impact of the things we do. But it also doesn't mean

that it's a sin to start a fire, or to have cattle, or to eat meat, or to burn fossil fuels. But it does seem to mean that we should at least care about the world, not for its own sake, but because we love the creator whom the world reveals to us.

I really want to emphasize this, that there is a world of difference between being an environmentalist and being a Christian steward of the world: while environmentalism often seeks to preserve nature as a self-contained end in itself, stewardship is meant to recognize that the cosmos are God's 'household,' created as a 'fitting instrument' for His glory. We should not act out of fear of total environmental collapse. Instead we should act out of a sense of 'debt' to the Spirit, using the world according to 'God's ordering'.

Unlike secular efforts to fix a dying planet, we 'wait with patience' for a 'transformative break' where God—not man—will 'refine' and 'restore' this groaning creation into an incorruptible home.

What is our motivation for stewarding creation? It isn't that "we are the ones who have to create heaven on earth," or "we are the ones who have to make that happen, and until we do it won't happen." Scripture depicts the restoration of the cosmos as something that takes place when Christ returns. And that is at once something cataclysmic and also renovative.

Paul Kingsnorth's recent book *Against the Machine* actually does an excellent job of reminding us of the goodness of creation and how we have hurt ourselves by neglecting it. But Kingsnorth does seem to think that the goal is to get back to Eden. And what I hope you see by now is that the return of Christ will not be a turning back of the clock. We're not meant to go back to Eden. We're meant to go forward into the *new* thing that God is doing when he doesn't just turn the clock back, he's going to "set creation free from its bondage to corruption." When we as God's children obtain the glory of God, creation is going to share in that. That's why it's looking forward to that day.

And this means that what is coming is far better than Eden. We don't hope for Eden. We hope for something so much better that will never fall or fail or die or be subjected ever again.

Our hope is not an escape *from* the world. Our real hope is the redemption *of* the world. In fact, our certainty of this "adoption and redemption" should change how we live now. If God loves the world enough to promise its total renewal, we can bear our present "momentary afflictions" with patience, knowing that the "summing up of all things in Christ" is certain.

Let's pray.