

## **“Hoping For What We Do Not See”**

### **Romans 8:18-25**

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.

## **Hoping For What We Do Not See**

Romans 8:18-25

July 23, 2023

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

### **I.**

For those who might be newer to the scene, I share that some measure of thanks is owed to those who have been around awhile, who, a few years ago renegotiated my contract to include a maximum of one fishing sermon a summer. With no length limit being imposed, I might add. It seems old Rev. Mike got a little carried away with the fishing stories and analogies so a few of our congregation's leaders pulled me aside to have a gentle "chat" which served to put the kibosh on all of that. Which is fine, and as it should be. Always nice to have people you love call you on your "stuff."

Given that today is last the last Sunday before I take a much needed vacation, the smart money was on this being my estival, or once a summer, fishing sermon. So, let me see if I can dangle a few enticements in front of you with the goal of luring you in and getting you hooked on the idea of hoping for what we do not see courtesy of the Apostle Paul in the 8th chapter of Romans.

### **II.**

As many of you know by now, fishing is something of a passion with me and I labor vigorously to keep myself at some level which is just south of fanatical. Few things in life are more appealing to me than being on the water, in a gentle breeze, on a beautiful morning and allowing one's focus to become singular in purpose and intent. The technical aspect of the sport is also quite alluring to me (pun intended) with the endless array of lures, baits, rods and techniques one can explore, learn and utilize. The sport of fishing also greatly rewards those who accumulation both knowledge and experience. Like the art of raising children, one's success at the art of fishing is always a function of time spent. The more you do it, the better at it you become, and the better the results for your efforts. All that, and it is pretty darn exciting to feel that tug on your line, reel in that fish and, then, do it all over again. Though bigger is better in some regard, catching fish of any size is just plain fun.

### III.

Even more fun for me (well, almost) is watching kids discover how much *fun* it is to catch fish, and to observe them in discovering that fishing is something *they* can do, and become fairly good at; usually, in a relatively short amount of time. Unfortunately, many kids no longer experience the fun of fishing, so a few years back I started a modest charter service on Trout Lake. I only take kids out fishing (with parents of course) and guarantee every person in the boat will catch at least one fish or I don't get paid; and, in the 15 years I've been doing it, I've *always* been paid. I charge \$50/hour (fishing time, not travel), with two hours being the typical duration of a charter, and I provide the rods/reels and bait, and put everything on and off the hook (unless the kids want to learn to do so). I have also taken a fair number of church kids, neighbor kids, and the children of friends and family out fishing simply for the sheer delight of it; and make no mistake, it *is* a delight.

### IV.

Such delight was on the docket for the day when I arrived at 7:15 a.m. this past Monday at a rental camp down the lake to meet up with a family who had driven 22 hours from Oklahoma to vacation on Trout Lake. Smart Sooners that they are, they had emailed me ahead of time to schedule a charter, and there standing on the dock were three kids dressed and ready to go. Ranging in age from 8 to 12, I put the kids in my boat and the dad followed after us in the camp's rental boat. Though a very satisfactory situation for him, this was by design: mine not his. I have found that in such a context kids learn better and easier if the lessons are not being taught by their parent; moreover, I generally find it quite hard to teach adults just about anything when it comes to fishing. Too much old dog. With kids, they keep their egos out of it and are, for the most part, blissfully unself-conscious.

### V.

Lest you come to imagine that it is all fun and games, let me assure you that having three kids in the same 14 foot boat with all of them fishing at the same time is a relentless labor. I was working just about every minute of the entire two hours we were out fishing. Beyond the baiting of hooks, untangling of rods, and removal of fish, there are the million question kids ask, the challenge of each kid's personality, and the normal sibling rivalry/squabbling. Mercifully, the kids in the boat this day were incredibly polite and well-

behaved; which is certainly not always the case. Though, being from Oklahoma, perhaps it should not be all that surprising. Amazing how far “please,” “thank you” and “excuse me” will take you in life.

Equally amazing, are the 50 plus fish these three kids caught, in total, in the span of a little over an hour. Fish were getting pulled out of the water left and right, with all three having a fish on the line on several occasions. They had a ball, as did I; another successful fishing charter with Rev. Mike.

## **VI.**

Today’s scripture reading from Romans 8 finds the Apostle Paul considering the sufferings of the age; the suffering of those in *his* age which apply just as equally to all of us in *our* age. One of the things I admire most about Paul, is that he doesn’t sugarcoat things nor does he pussy-foot around; he tells it like it is, and deals with things as they lie. Also, as ever the case with Paul, he never bows to the easy answer.

Though I am sure the folks in Rome were hoping for some quick and effortless fix for their struggles, woes and miseries, Paul, instead, gives it to them straight; with his answer to them being just as “spot on” for us. First, he explains how we are all part of a much larger picture; one cosmic in scope:

*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.*

## **VII.**

Next, Paul raises the issue of hope which is the reason that Christ was raised onto the cross and raised up from the dead: for it is “in hope we were saved.” Finally, Paul introduces the nature of such a hope as ours:

*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.*

Being a fishing fanatic not withstanding, it is difficult for me to imagine a better or more illustrative example of waiting for patience for a hope unseen than kids fishing. Though fairly obvious, let me point out that in most cases you simply cannot see the fish for which you are fishing and are hoping to eventually catch. Fishing requires a certain level of hope, in general, that fish

are actually *living* in the waters you are fishing. Fishing also require a certain kind of hope, in specific, that you can do what is required to actually *catch* the fish. With all of this occurring in ways that are unseen.

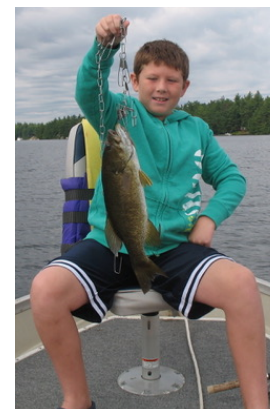
### VIII.

Whenever possible, I always like to “grease the skids” of an up-coming fishing charter. I do so by sending photos ahead of time, by text or email, showing some of the fish that *I* have caught over the years so they can reframe their understanding of the size of the fish that ply the waters of this particular lake.





Then, I send photos of fish actual kids have caught, on their own, while on one of my charters. Seeing other kids their same very age holding up nice size fish, each with a “careful, or you’ll break your face” kind of smile helps the next boatload of kids to realize that such a thing is possible...for *them!*



Let me assure you, photos like these certainly fire the imagination and by the time I pull up to their dock on the day of the charter, kids have been having Captain Ahab-esque dreams of landing their own great white whale. A morning out on a fishing charter with Rev. Mike is the very definition of hoping for what we do not see.

## **IX.**

Up until this point, I could have written today's sermon at anytime during the past 10 or 15 years. However, this past week I had a new realization while out fishing in my schooner with the Sooners. Not only were they hoping for what they could not see, it occurred to me that *all* they could see were good things coming from their hope. Sticking with the analogy, when fishing *everything* for which one hopes is, by nature, unseen. Moreover, there is no downside to hoping for what we do not see as the worst that could happen is you catch nothing; which is the same result you get from not hoping, or not fishing, in the first place. The great lesson fishing has to teach us is there is no point in hoping to avoid the bad, as there is no "bad" with fishing. With fishing we hope only for varying degrees of good. It follows, then, that if we are *going* to hope, we might as well hope BIG.

## **X.**

This morning, I have trolled you through the deep waters of hope because I would argue, and as Paul points out in today's passage, that the same is true with our faith as with fishing; as we only ever place our faith in a hope for that which do not see. Furthermore, even if we only ever have a *little* faith, we should still hope in BIG ways.

Though I am in danger of "over-sharing" I confess that as I've grown older most of my own *personal* hopes only have to do with merely avoiding the bad. These days, I rarely find myself hoping to hit a home run. Instead, I am just hoping to not get tagged out because I stepped off the bag by accident, or because I'm not paying attention. Forget about swinging for the fences, I am more than happy (elated, actually) just to get on base with a bunt. This, though, is like going out fishing and only ever hoping to catch a few small ones, while giving no thought, energy or effort to landing a lunker. Which, if you think about it, is no way to go fishing and certainly no way to go through life.

## **XI.**

This morning, I would like to challenge us to reexamine our own hope. Hope is allowing our faith to become singular in purpose and intent, and to explore, learn and utilize the endless array of techniques through which all us can begin to have hope; even to the point of hoping not just to avoid the bad things we can imagine all too easily, but especially in hoping for the good we simply do not see or can even begin to dream.

The practice of hope greatly rewards those who accumulation both knowledge and experience. As such, hope is also a function of time spent: the more we do it, the better at it we become, and the better the results for our efforts. While it is certainly wonderful, not to mention just plain fun, to have hope in *any* measure, we should always endeavor to hope BIG. We should also recognize that hope is something *we* can do, and become fairly good at; usually, in a relatively short amount of time. Hope is nothing but sheer delight.

## **XII.**

Finally, we need to always factor in that the hope we have for our own lives, for our family, church and community, and for our nation, are bound together with the cosmos as creation. The Apostle Paul reminds us:

*The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing 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.*

Though we still suffer in this present time, the glory being revealed to us is that hope is possible in ways *far* larger than we could have, or would have, ever imagined; and, moreover, that such a hope is possible...for *us*! For it is in such a hope we have been saved. Let us wait for our hope together, then, and with patience; like kids with fishing poles in hand, out on the water, in a gentle breeze, on such a beautiful morning as this. Amen.