

**MORE THAN EGGS:
A NEW CREATION
ROMANS 8:18-23
APRIL 21, 2013**

Every now and then I'll get a child's question,

"My dog died last week.

I loved my dog, and she loved me.

I'm really sad.

Will my dog be in heaven?"

What do say to that?

How do you deal with that?

By the way, many adults want to know, too,
but we won't usually ask out loud.

I tell them I have reasons to believe their dog could be in heaven.

In the Bible I read about God taking great care in creating,
making everything he made on purpose,
that he cares about it all.

When the flood was coming,

God had Noah take animals on the ark,
because he cared about the animals, too.

And at the very end of the Bible

God promises a whole new creation,
all things made new, not just people, but all things.

So I think their dog just might be in heaven.

Today we're going to dig into a small piece of Paul's letter to the church in Roman where he talks about this.

Well, not specifically about someone's pet dog,

but about the future God has for his creation.

This involves more than candy eggs, more than just you and me,
but God's entire creation.

But first, I want to bring up one small detail in one of the Gospels as it tells the story of Easter.

It is in John's Gospel, chapter 20, verse 7.

When the disciples went into the empty tomb on Easter morning,
they saw that part of the burial cloth has been neatly folded.

It was the small cloth that was placed over Jesus' face.

It was not thrown aside like the larger burial cloth,
but neatly folded and placed where his head had been.

Why did Jesus fold the linen burial cloth after His resurrection?

And why does John's Gospel takes an entire verse to tell us this detail?

Was that important?

Absolutely!

A bit little of Hebrew tradition from that day makes the point.

The folded napkin had to do with the Master and Servant in an ancient Hebrew household.

When the servant set the dinner table for the master,
he made sure that it was exactly the way the master wanted it.

The servant would wait, just out of sight,
until the master had finished eating,

and the servant would not dare touch that table until the master was finished.

Now if the master was finished eating,
 he would rise from the table, wipe his fingers, his mouth, and clean his beard,
 and would wad up that napkin and toss it onto the table.
 The servant would then know to clear the table.

In those days, the wadded napkin meant, "I'm finished."

But if the master got up from the table,
 and folded his napkin, and laid it beside his plate,
 the servant would not dare touch the table, because
 the folded napkin meant, "I'm coming back!"

Jesus left a folded napkin.

He's coming back.

And when he comes back, he'll come to renew, resurrect, us and his entire creation

Now, let's turn to Romans 8, and see some of what that renewal and resurrection is about.

ROMANS 8:18-23

The whole creation.

The whole creation subjected to frustration.

The whole creation in bondage to decay.

The whole creation groaning as in the pains of childbirth.

The whole creation waiting for liberation.

The whole creation longing for redemption.

Had you ever noticed that?

Have you pondered it?

So often when we talk about Easter, resurrection, life after death and such,

it's in the language of our spirits leaving our bodies and going to heaven.

But that's not how the Bible talks about it.

The Bible tells us that Jesus' resurrection was a bodily resurrection,

that the tomb was empty, no BODY was there. (Mt.28; Mk.16, Lk.24; Jn.20)

That when he appeared to his followers after that he showed them the scars of the cross.

Spirits don't have scars; physical bodies do. (Jn.20:20; 27)

That at least once or twice the risen Jesus shared a meal with them. (Lk.24:30; Jn.21:9)

Disembodied spirits don't eat; whole, embodied people do.

And the Bible says that one we'll share in a resurrection like his, (Ro.6:5; 1Cor.15:12f)
 a bodily resurrection.

Notice Paul wrote, "We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons and daughters of God,
 the redemption of our bodies." (23)

And finally the Bible says the whole creation will be redeemed,

made to be a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth. (Re.21:1)

In fact, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah gives us a number of pictures of the creation,
 not just human beings, but the whole creation,
 transformed and made new in the kingdom of God.

"The wolf will live with the lamb,

the leopard will lie down with the goat,

the calf and the lion and the yearling together;

and a little child shall lead them.

The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,

and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.

They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.

The whole earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord." (Is.11:6, 8-9)

The whole earth, all of creation.

But let's back up the cart and get the whole story on this.

All the way back to the book of Genesis, to the creation story.

We've all heard the story of Adam and Eve.

Placed in a wonderful garden created by God to supply their every need.

Put there to tend it, till it, care for it, make responsible use of it.

(Ge.1:28-29; 2:5, 16)

But they crossed the line and ate the one thing they were not to eat.

(Ge.2:17; 3:1f)

Anything else in the whole garden was theirs.

But you know how your kids would act if you told them,

two weeks prior to Christmas,

"Don't go snooping in our closet."

They're going to dig into that closet.

The word, "No," sometimes acts like a magnet.

And, truth be told, it's not just that way for children.

Adam and Eve just had to step over that line.

Sheer willfulness.

"I'll show you who's in charge of my life."

As a result of their sin God pronounced a series of curses.

I'm not sure that God made the curses happen.

I sort of think they were simply the ripple effects of sin.

But the ripple effect included all of creation.

God said, "Cursed is the ground because of you;

through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you,

and you will eat the plants of the field."

(Ge.3:17-18)

Cursed is the ground.

From that point on there is alienation between humans and the rest of creation,

and there is brokenness within creation itself.

The result, Paul says, is that "the creation was subjected to frustration,

not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it."

(20)

The creation did nothing wrong,

but is inevitably effected by human sin.

All of creation is interconnected,

so when Adam and Eve went off the track

there was the ripple effect that touched everything, everything, God had made.

We, of course, share in that situation of the creation's frustration.

And we share in the creation's "groaning as in the pains of childbirth."

(22)

Paul says "we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly" for the things to come.

(23)

This kind of groaning is a sign of hope.

When someone is suffering they may groan out of pain or discomfort.

But the groaning Paul refers to has something more to it.

It is a groan that is not just out of current pain,

but a groan that is longing for the good that is to come.

He likens it to the groans of a woman in labor.

Jesus said the same thing, speaking of the troubles of this broken world as

"the first birth pangs of the new age." (Mt.24:8)

Birth pangs of labor.

Some of you know a little about that.

The pain is there, and the pain is very real.

But you push through it, so to speak, because of what you know is coming.

You're waiting, hoping and straining forward for that baby.
 And when that baby is born,
 it's not long before all that pain in labor is a faint memory.
 It's a good thing, because otherwise
 we might all be only children and parents of only children.
 That's why Paul writes in verse 18,
 "I consider our present sufferings are
 not worth comparing with the glory
 that will be revealed in us."
 The glory that will be revealed IN us. (18)
 There will be some wonderful transformations
 that take place in each one of us.

Paul writes of the whole creation and us groaning as if in labor.
 Suffering because of past sin, yes,
 but also hopeful because of future promise.
 He says "the creation waits in eager longing." (19)
 The Greek phrase means "to wait with the head raised,"
 as if standing on tip-toe and holding your head up high
 to try see over the horizon.

This is the groaning of hope, longing for, reaching out for, living for
 the fulfillment of great dreams,
 resurrection and renewal in the completed kingdom of God.

Remember how, in Genesis 3, all creation was put under a curse after Adam and Eve sinned?
 When the kingdom comes, the book of Revelation says,
 "No longer will there be any curse." (Re.22:3)
 "There will be no more death or mourning, no more crying or pain,
 for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev.21:4)
 It's dead and gone;
 now it is resurrected, transformed into something more wonderful.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians,
 "The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable,
 and the mortal with immortality." (1Cor.15:53)

And to the Philippians he said,
 "We await Jesus, who will transform our lowly bodies
 so that they will be like his glorious body." (Phlp.3:20-21)

The transformation of all creation, the transformation of you and me, into God's ideal.
 This is our hope, made sure by what God has already done in the resurrection of Jesus.
 The resurrection of Jesus is the first fruits of things to come,
 the resurrection and transformation of all of God's creation.

So what does it all mean that God intends to resurrect and transform his entire creation?

It means the physical, material world matters deeply to God.

It is not something he intends to discard when things wind down.

He intends to save it!

Which suggests that, between now and then

his physical material world should matter deeply to us as well.

It is not here for us to abuse and use carelessly.

We were put here in the beginning to tend it, till it, care for it, make responsible use of it.

And that is still our job.

We are stewards of God's creation,

and he expects us to take our responsibility seriously.
 Which means, of course, we need to be concerned with cleaning up the environment.
 Not going to the extremes that some do,
 worshiping the environment as if
 it's more valuable than human well-being.
 But taking good care of it.

The future resurrection and transformation of the entire creation also means

God is concerned with the well-being, the fitness and health, of our physical bodies.

In fact, Paul wrote to the church,

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?” (1Cor.6:19)

Your bodies are where God chooses to take up residence in this world,
 so he can continue his work in the world.

Paul wrote that because there were some in the church who thought

God was only concerned with saving disembodied spirits after death,
 so what they did with their bodies here and now did not matter to God.

Some of you are thinking,

“Wow, I could eat myself to death, and God would not care.”

Paul says, “No, God DOES care.

Your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit.

Don't turn it into an entire apartment complex for the Holy Spirit.”

Some of the people in the Corinth church thought

they could go visiting prostitutes, and God would not care.

Paul said, “No, God DOES care.

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

You cannot join it to prostitutes.”

God cares about your health and physical well-being.

And he intends, one day, to resurrect your body

and transform it into something more glorious than it has ever been.

Just as John described for the new creation,

“There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.” (Re.21:4)

All frailty, all brokenness, all flaws, all weaknesses, gone.

“For the old order of things has passed away.

Behold, I am making all things new!”

(Re.21:4b-5)

One of our former members used to describe herself as “short and stout.”

She moved away a number of years ago, but she used to say,

“When I get to heaven, I'm going to have Barbie legs.”

In a tongue-in-cheek way, she was anticipating being made new.

But she knew the promise of new creation goes far deeper than Barbie legs.

You might know of Charles de Gaulle as the famous French WWII soldier and later president of France.

Charles and Evonne de Gaulle were the parents of a severely mentally handicapped child.

The doctors said with her disability she would not live long.

She was a treasure and a great concern to her parents.

No matter how bad things were happening in France,

Charles would always make time for he and his Evonne to have time with their daughter.

Almost every night after they had put her to bed,

Evonne would ask, "Charles, why couldn't she have been like the others?"

As predicted by the doctor, the little girl died in her youth.

There was a private graveside service.

After the priest had pronounced the benediction,

everyone began to leave, everyone except Evonne.
 Charles went back to her and said,
 "Come, Evonne.
 Did you not hear the blessing of the priest?
 Now she is like all the others."

That is the promise and the power of resurrection!

We and God's entire creation shall be made new, whole,
 as God intended from the beginning.

So the psalmist write,

"Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
 let the sea resound, and all that is in it;
 let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them.

Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy;
 they will sing before the Lord,

for he comes, he comes to judge the earth."

(Ps.96:11-13)

AMEN!

By the way, your dog may be in the midst of that creation chorus.

Let's sing with all creation the praises of our God!

Scriptures cited: Jn.20:7; Ro.8:19-23; Mt.28; Mk.16, Lk.24; Jn.20; Jn.20:20; 27; Lk.24:30; Jn.21:9; Ro.6:5;
 1Cor.15:12f; Re.21:1; Is.11:6, 8-9; Ge.1:28-29; 2:5, 16-17; 3:1f, 17-18; Re.22:3; 21:4; 1Cor.15:53; Phlp.3:20-21;
 1Cor.6:19; Re.21:4-5; Ps.96:11-13