

July 19, 2026

Romans 8:12-25 “Labor Pains”

Last week I made an observation about the world we live in. I said, "Something is wrong." And I could feel the, "Well... no kidding" vibes when I said it. But I'm here to say it again. *Something is wrong.* "Wait, you aren't going to go into Debbie Downer mode are you, Pastor? Good grief. The Baptists are here with us this morning. Don't start in with the whole 'everything is awful' routine."

Let me be clear. I *didn't* say, "Everything is awful." I said, "Something is wrong." There's a big difference. There are a lot of things going on that are wonderful. We have the Boutique, which has become an unofficial fellowship group in our church. We've been so successful with our capital campaign that we're already starting projects on our "to-do" list. When you get a chance, drive up Oleander from the junior high to the church. It looks bright and beautiful now. Go through the back door of K-Hall and notice how vibrant and fresh the walls along that breezeway are! We have people visiting our congregation—and staying! We have a renewed sense of purpose! We have Bunco, for crying out loud! We have an outdoor brunch party coming up in August with badminton, cornhole, a giant Connect Four board, lots of food, and plenty of fellowship. And I'm grateful that we have such a wonderful relationship with our sister church over on Palmetto that they can come over here and worship

with us for a few Sundays this summer. See? I am not being Debbie Downer!

On a more personal note, Mary and I are empty-nesters! And yes, maybe I've announced that a few more times than necessary over the last few months, but it is so liberating! We've got our family from Virginia coming out this fall, another granddaughter due on Thanksgiving, and they'll all be here for Christmas too! These solar panels on the roof? The ones that pump all that extra power onto PG&E's grid? After five years of negotiations with PG&E, they now power the parsonage too! Forty-dollar utility bills during the heat of the summer feel like getting a significant raise! As the old Joe Walsh song says, "I can't complain, but sometimes I still do. Life's been good to me so far."

Again, I'm not saying that everything is bad. I'm saying something is wrong. I don't need to make a list of all the ways we see it because it doesn't require great observational skills to know it's true. Think about the concerns we lift up during Prayers of the People each Sunday. Have you ever noticed how the same themes keep coming back? We pray about aging, health concerns, family relationships, grief, obligations, and dealing with big life changes. "Well of course that comes up a lot, Pastor. Look at our congregation. We are getting older. You too grandpa."

Yes. Agreed. But there are other things that keep coming up no matter what age we're talking about. Family matters.

Security. Safety. Injustice. Division. World events that affect our everyday lives. Challenges that seem beyond our control. These things all add to the feeling that the world isn't what it ought to be. Deep down, we know this isn't the world God intended. I know people who live with these realities every day who often wonder if things are just going to keep getting worse instead of getting better.

In this passage from Romans, Paul speaks directly to that feeling. He says that the whole creation is groaning... like someone going through labor pains. That's an interesting image because labor pains are painful, but they're not pointless. They tell us that something new is on the way. Paul invites us to see our lives as part of a much bigger story. I'm going to reference some themes we've covered both here in worship and in Bible study. Don't worry if you haven't been here for all of it. I'm simply trying to help us see the bigger picture Paul is painting. Here's what we learned when we studied the Book of Genesis.

I. God Created a Good World

According to both creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, creation was not an accident. It wasn't disposable. In fact, it was good. More than good—it was *very* good. Sometimes we forget that the Bible doesn't begin with sin. It begins with goodness. It begins with beauty. It begins with abundance. It begins with harmony. God created a world that reflected God's own goodness. Furthermore, God created humanity to bear God's image and commissioned *us* to be stewards of

God's creation. These creation stories are about bringing order out of chaos. They're about everything being in right relationship—God, humanity, one another, and the earth itself. But we all know this isn't the world we experience today. Sin entered the picture and fractured that harmony. It broke our relationship with God, with one another, and even with creation itself.

II. In Romans we learned that Sin Broke More Than People

Last week we began to see how Paul broadens our vision when it comes to sin and its effects. We usually think sin just impacts individuals. But Paul says creation itself has been subjected to futility. The brokenness we experience isn't just about "my problems." It's cosmic. Creation groans. People groan. We groan because we know the world isn't the way God intended it to be. You know that ache you feel when you hear about another war, another wildfire, or another frightening diagnosis? That ache isn't a lack of faith. It's evidence that you know creation was made for something better.

III. Christ Began God's *New Creation*

So here's the turning point, and we talked about this last week: God did not abandon creation. God entered it. As followers of Christ, we affirm that God became incarnate in the person of Jesus. At first glance we might think, "Great! Jesus is here to get us out of this mess." But that's not quite Paul's picture. Jesus isn't God's escape plan. Jesus is God's

restoration plan. Sometimes Christians talk as though God's goal is simply to rescue us from the earth someday. Paul tells a much bigger story. God's plan isn't to throw creation away. God's plan is to redeem it. Through Christ, death loses its final word. Through Christ the Spirit is given. Through Christ we are adopted as God's children. New creation has begun. Notice I said "begun." Not completed... begun. That's why Paul talks about the "first fruits." The harvest has started, but it isn't finished. More is still coming.

IV. The Spirit Forms a New Kind of People

This is where Paul's focus shifts to us. Creation is waiting for the revealing of God's children. Why? Because God's people become signs of the coming kingdom. Every act of forgiveness. Every act of generosity. Every act of reconciliation. Every meal shared. Every lonely person welcomed. Every time we choose compassion over hatred, hope over fear, or grace over revenge, we give the world a glimpse of where God is taking creation. The church doesn't build the Kingdom, and I know sometimes it may sound like that's what I'm saying. No, the church doesn't build it, the church *bears witness* to it.

V. Hope Lives Somewhere Between the Already and the Not Yet

Here's something to remember: Paul never says labor doesn't hurt. He says labor has purpose. Think about why Paul chose that image. He could have compared creation to someone

dying, but he didn't. He compared creation to a woman giving birth. Labor is painful. Sometimes unbearably so. But every contraction means the same thing: new life is getting closer. Paul says that's what history is like. The world is still groaning. We still groan. But groaning isn't the last chapter. Hope is. That's why Christians can tell the truth about suffering without surrendering to despair.

So, let's go back to the original question: Is the world broken? Of course it is. But that's not the most important question. The real question is this: "Is God finished?" Paul's answer is a resounding "no." The Creator is still creating. The Spirit is still equipping. Christ is still redeeming. Creation is still groaning. Hope is still alive. And we are called to live as people who give the world a glimpse of what God is bringing.

Faith isn't pretending the world isn't broken. Faith is trusting that the God who began creation has not abandoned it. The story isn't over. God is not finished yet.