

Can You Hear It?
Romans 8:18–27

You may notice this when you are in a relationship with somebody. Whether you have kids, or if your married, or with your friends this rings true. Different sounds a person makes indicate different things they are feeling or thinking. Here's what I mean by that: a subtle sigh might mean someone is tired of you talking or maybe exhausted by the stresses of the day. There are many audible clues that give us an idea of what a loved one or stranger is actually thinking or what they want. Clearing your throat can be an indication that you want someone's attention. A quick chuff or chortle during an argument could mean that the person thinks your full of it. Clenching your teeth and inhaling often means "yikes". If you are listening, the noise gives a great sense of what the other is feeling or thinking. If you don't listen. If you aren't really paying attention then you can be guilty of misinterpretation. Kids even do this. You can often tell by the cries they make what kind of emotion they are feeling. A louder cry is something more serious. A soft whimper might be something they are just frustrated by. Different noises tell you if they are hungry or angry or happy or sad. We have all of these audible clues that help us understand one another. And if we are listening and paying attention then we can translate them and solve the problem that this person is presenting.

Doctors do this too in their medical evaluation of people. When they listen to your body with a stethoscope, they pay attention to the noise your body and specific organs make. It's called *auscultation*. So they listen to the noises that your body is making and use that information to make a diagnosis. They use those sounds to decipher the pain and what is happening inside your body. When they know, they provide a solution to your issues. They give an answer in the form of treatment, medication, life style changes that need to take place in order for healing to begin. Listening is important when it comes to solving problems. Being a good listener is very important if you truly wish to be a difference maker and problem solver in our world today. Maybe you've dealt with people before who just barge in. They know the answers. They know the solutions. They already can tell what the problem is and they are already preparing a plan to fix everything. Yet, they haven't taken the time to listen. It's not very effective in the end. How can you know how to solve a problem when you don't take the time to listen? How can you provide a solution when you haven't even heard the problem?

Well, we are kind of wrestling with that today in the words of Paul in his letter to the Romans. He talks about the noises that creation makes, the noises that we creatures make in that creation. I want to read part of that epistle again. As I read it I want you to listen. Listen for the problems. Listen to the solutions. Paul writes, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

See, there's a lot of noises going on in the culture, in our world, and even in our very own bodies and minds. Yeah, we have our physical ailments. We have our pains and maladies that we deal with on a daily basis. But what are the deep groanings? What are the deep longings that we hear in the culture? That we hear in our communities? That we hear in ourselves? And if we as the church do not take the time to listen then how can we present a gospel that satisfies, the gospel that satisfies? So, the question today that I think about over and over and over again is this: Can you hear it? Can you hear the noises of the culture? Can you hear the plight and suffering of people? Can you hear creation itself groaning and longing for some kind of rescue and relief? Can you hear it?

It's pretty easy to look at our world, if we aren't too consumed with ourselves, and hear the problems that are going on. The cries for justice in the streets. The cries for connectivity and community again in the midst of separation. Cries for a cure for not only coronavirus but for cancer, dementia, autism, and Alzheimers. There are groanings and longings that are obvious to us. Just open a window. Just turn on the news. You can see it. You can hear it. You know them. But there are also some not so obvious to us. People who hold in their pain. People who hide the scars of abuse and neglect behind masks of satisfaction. People who struggle with their identity. People who struggle with where they belong. People who struggle with a relationship with God. People who struggling with addictions or grief. People who struggle with a sense of purpose. Can you hear it? Can you hear them? This is sin in the world and just like pain in our bodies that needs attention and treatment, this is sin that needs to be heard, diagnosed and treated. These are the groanings of creation, longing for some kind of healing, some kind of deliverance, some kind of fixing. Can you hear it?

As we wrestle with the known and unknown pains in the world and our lives we are tempted to look up to God and yell. Can you hear it? Can you hear me? Can you deal with it please? Do you hear anything at all way up there, way above us, way far away from everything that is happening around me down here? Can you hear any of it? Do you hear any of it? We shake our fists at the sky in anger. We curl up into balls of depression and exhaustion as we give up the fight. Many feel God doesn't listen. He hasn't listened. We know that there is groaning. We know that there is pain but maybe we aren't doing it loud enough. The pain isn't strong enough. Or maybe God is just indifferent to it all. God, can you hear it? Can you hear us? Can you hear me? Creation is groaning for you. I am writhing in pain, twisted up in anxiety. I need more. We need more. Where are you? Can you hear me?

In this last week I had a few moments where I just felt completely frozen in place. I took in the latest news. I heard the latest reports. I saw complaints and arguments on social media and I just froze. Helpless and useless to do anything. I just sat there, overwhelmed, thinking what in the world am I supposed to do. Everything seems so unfixable. Everything seems so immovable. Everything seems so far gone. The noises are loud and obvious. The pain is real. The groanings are perpetual and I hear them but I don't know what to do. You see people in charge and it's clear that they don't know what to do. The people who snipe at them from below don't know any better. It's overwhelming. It's frustrating. It might be why opioid deaths are up. It might be why suicides are spiking. It might be why domestic violence becomes more commonplace. The crushing reality drives us to more animal behavior. Can we hear the groanings of creation? Can we identify the groanings and longings within ourselves? And can we properly identify and diagnose and provide a meaningful and lasting solution?

In scripture it is very obvious that God hears. It is very obvious that God is attentive to the pleas and cries of his people. God pays attention to them and in his time provides a solution. Psalm 130 is one often read at graveside committals. It is a psalm of ascent, one you pray as you go up to the temple to receive forgiveness. The psalmist shares in our grief. He laments and demands to be heard. He questions where God is at. He expresses pain in the waiting but a hopeful conclusion that is trustworthy and true. Hear some portions of this prayer: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to my pleas for mercy! I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

On one of my communion visits this last week, a member and I talked about how this COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown has been going on for four months now. When will it end? That was the question. When will the fears finally be relieved? When will the vaccine come? When will the mitigation finally take root? When will this problem end? When will it be solved? I thought to myself, the people of God have been waiting on him for a lot of things for a long time. It took from creation to the birth of Jesus, Genesis chapter 3 until Matthew chapter 1 for God to make good on his Eden promise. Even then, when Jesus was born, there was still another 33 years until the work would be accomplished. Thousands and thousands of years. Thousands and thousands of people. Generations come and gone. All waiting on the Lord.

Groaning and in pain. Waiting for God to come and rescue. And here I am fretting about 4 months.

But when He did deliver on that promise. When he did respond. He responded in a way that caught every religious scholar off guard. Every pious person. Every temple attendant. They couldn't see what God was doing right in front of their eyes. Jesus came as a direct response to our sin and our groaning. And Jesus came at the right time, in the right place, to do the exact right thing to give the right kind of healing, to provide us with the right prescription for our sin and our pain and our groaning. And as he went on the cross, as he groaned on that instrument of death, he fully identified with our humanity. He gave up his spirit and died. Through that death all sin was accounted for. Through that death all sin was atoned for. Through that death all pain was responded to. Then three days later. We had to wait three more days. Three days later Jesus came back to life. He rose from the dead. He rose from the grave to show us that death isn't the hope we have. Death isn't the thing we should long for in our groaning. We have resurrection coming. That is the great hope that awaits us because it happened to him in his groaning and pain. He knew just as we know that we don't place our pains and our sins and our groanings and our longings anywhere else but on the cross, on our savior and trust in him because in him is where life is given. In him is where the true remedy comes for our pain. In him is the antidote for death itself.

Paul knew that in our text. That's what he was attesting to in his writings to the Roman Christians. "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." Then Paul has an answer for that idea of patience. We don't want to be patient. We've been patient long enough. I've waited for far too long already. He says, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought." Did you ever feel that way? You look at the world. You look at yourself and you say, "Gosh, I'm so overwhelmed that I don't even know what to pray for."

"But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." That when we are done groaning. When we are tired of moaning and longing we can collapse and let the Spirit take over for us. "And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Isn't that amazing? God does have a plan for us in our groaning. He has a plan for creation in its longing. And we know for certain that it is coming. But he also promises his Spirit now to groan for us. That when we are tired, when we are tempted to give up because we are falling apart, the Spirit will take over for us and groan on our behalf and remind God that we are still waiting on Him. Can you hear it?

I'll tell you what: the role of the church in a time like this is to not sit in a heap of ash and mourn for ourselves. As the Spirit groans for us, we turn our ears to the world. We turn our ears to the culture and we listen. We listen to what they are groaning for. We do our own sort of auscultation as we listen intently, as with a stethoscope over a body, over every organ, over every member what noise it makes. Each broken person in this world. What do they need? Where are they placing their hope? Why are they groaning? And we respond with the medicine of Jesus. We respond with the medicine of the cross. We respond with the medicine that is the empty tomb. We respond with this hope that is greater than anything else offered to the world. It's the only thing that lasts. It's the only thing that is a permanent solution to our groaning.

So don't ask God if he hears you. He does. Just be patient and if you feel like giving up let the Spirit take over and let him groan for you. And as he is advocating for you, you use your moment of waiting to hear the groanings of others. As you hear, point them to the only place where they can find rest for their souls and healing for their bodies. The only place that repairs relationships, picks us up out our sin, allows us to leave shame and regret behind. Yes we still groan in this day and age and God hears us. But one day that groaning and mourning will be turned to dancing. The tears we shed in our longing will be wiped away. Can you hear it? We have that in Jesus. Don't you want it for them too? Amen.