

23 And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children,^[l] including the new bodies he has promised us. 24 We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope^[k] for it. 25 But if we look forward to something we do not yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

Romans 8:23-25 (NLT)

Greetings my friends!

I was thinking a great deal recently about what Paul means when he speaks about having an “eager hope.” The Greek word used to share this word literally means: “the act of craning the neck to get a better look at what is coming down the road. It is the upturned face of the farmer watching the sky before starting up the combine for harvest. It is the leaning forward of a woman on a train platform as she awaits a loved one's arrival.”¹

This image reminded me of the great parades that I experienced as a young boy living in Reading, Pennsylvania. Several times a year there would be parades that marched right past our house! All my cousins, my aunts, my uncles would gather with the “eager hope” of what the parade would bring! Sometimes the parade would bring candy thrown out to children along the parade route. Other times the parade would bring wonderful music bursting forth from gifted musicians, and of course my personal favorite; sometimes the parade would host none other than Santa Claus and I'd get my first glimpse of the year of this incredibly generous and amazing person! Just thinking about those days brings a smile to my face and joy to my heart all these years later.

Regardless of what the theme of the parade was, it was a day filled with fun, spending time with people I loved and sharing a common experience.

My hope my friends, is that soon we will be able to gather once again in person to celebrate worship. I have an “eager hope” for this day; yet if I am honest with myself and with all of you, I also have some trepidation.

We know that when we gather it will be in a different way than how we gathered prior to this pandemic. There will be some within our community of faith who we will ask to intentionally distance themselves from our gatherings for their own safety. For those who do attend our worship we will only see their smiling faces behind a mask. We will reflect on lyrics of songs without actually singing those songs, our “passing of the peace” will be conducted from an appropriate social distance and the manner in which we celebrate Holy Communion will feel a little foreign to us. Yet, even with all these adjustments to the way we will worship, I have an “eager hope” for the day to arrive!

Why?

Regardless of what the theme of the day will be, it will be a day filled with the Word of God, spending time with people I love and sharing a “new” but common experience with those people. It will be a day which will bring us all, one day closer to the fulfillment of how our Lord is calling us to be God's children living in this time and this place!

Please keep your elected community of faith leaders in your thoughts and prayers as next Tuesday we will be considering this time. Pray that it would be the Lord that guides our thoughts, discussions, and decisions and not the influences of the world that “pushes” us. Pray that God would continue to “bind” our communities together for the benefit of proclaiming the “Good News” to this generation. Pray that there would be a sense of peace and unity among all your elected community leaders as we move forward as One people!

Yet my friends, even as we wait with patience and confidence, join me in my “eager hope” that soon; we will be able to be with our sisters and brothers in Christ in person to worship and glorify our God!

For now;

Keep trusting God, keep washing those hands and wearing your face masks maintaining proper social distancing, and be at peace, for our Lord is walking with us!

PJ

1. *extracted from Mary Hinkle Shore Rector and Dean Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary Columbia, S.C from “Working Preacher.org” website.*