

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – July 19, 2020 – “With Patience”
Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24 and Romans 8:12-25**

I am currently working toward the completion of my final project for the Doctor of Ministry degree. The working title is “Blessed to Be a Blessing: Self-Giving as a Christian Discipleship Practice.” From my perspective, this concept is at the heart of how Jesus called us to live. For we worship the God who sent his Son into the world, not in order that he might be served but rather, that he might lay down his life for others. For you. For me. For our friends. For our family. For strangers. For people living in other lands. Even for our enemies. Yes. It is to all who are near and all who are far away that the Lord our God calls.

By entering our time, Jesus showed us how to live. And in time, we have heard his voice through the words and actions of faithful people who knew exactly what Paul meant when he wrote, as he did in our second lesson this morning, “that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.” This is a recognition, is it not, that even though our sovereign God created the world and called it good, there are many parts of this vast creation where all is not well?

A couple of weeks ago, I traveled with my immediate family to a Presbyterian camp that has suspended its regular activities this summer. Now, in lieu of children

and youth filling the cabins, folks like you and I are permitted to get away for a time. To inhabit a rustic spot tucked away in the woods. To go for a walk amid nature. To gaze at the stars. To dip our toes into the sand of the lakeshore. To feel connected to the world beyond our homes.

Following that first trip, I was eager to return. And on Friday night, we did - enjoying time in that same cabin. There, cell phone and internet reception comes and goes. So I was pleased, on Saturday morning, as I stepped outside and took a deep breath, that service was available and that I could access the daily news. At breakfast, hunching over my mobile device, I saw it in the very first headline of the day – a farewell tribute to a public servant named John Lewis. A man who became an icon of the Civil Rights Movement and who was later known as “the conscience of Congress.”

In young adulthood, Lewis was jailed on some forty occasions. While peacefully protesting for equal rights for all people, he was repeatedly beaten by white mobs and police officers. On one occasion, his skull was fractured by a police baton. On another, he was so violently attacked that he was left in a pool of his own blood. For years, a shelf in my church office holds a copy of his book entitled

Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement. And on Saturday morning, as I read that first tribute to his life, I began to cry.

In previous generations, fathers went to great lengths to conceal their tears from their children. But I have opted for a different approach. Rather than sweeping my emotions under the rug or retreating to a private place to collect myself, I used that moment as an opportunity to engage my oldest son in conversation. “Liam,” I said, “I just read an article about a very good man who died. He was a friend of Martin Luther King, Jr., and he became a Congressman.” I then went onto tell my son the story of John Lewis. And, with tears in my eyes, I told him how deeply saddened I am that such terrible things have happened to other people in our country.

John Lewis was a man of faith. He understood Paul’s claim that “the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.” And he recognized that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.” For life is short. So incredibly short. Which is why we need not squander the opportunity to live courageously and to speak boldly against the vestiges of injustice wherever they found. For, as Christians, we do not live for ourselves alone. But rather, we have been adopted into the household of God where, as fellow members of God’s purposes, we stand upon the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

As a parent, I desire for my own children to develop a moral framework for their lives. To know that when others make choices in opposition to our values that they need not simply go along for the ride. I want them to know that, even when they have left my sight, they are still a part of our family. And even more importantly, I want them to know that, at every moment, they have been adopted into the household of God. So I decided to share my tears. And as their cognitive ability allows, I will speak with them about injustice. For, indeed, the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.

In the midst of the current COVID-19 pandemic, we have been separated from one another for four long months. The wait has been painful, and we are tired. For some, hope is faltering. Despite our best efforts, we fear that we may still become infected with this new disease, and we are concerned about developing serious complications as a result. We are worried about our loved ones, especially those with preexisting conditions, who have the greatest rates of mortality. We also realize that there is so much that there is so much that we don't know. About the long-term impacts to children. About the adequacy of a vaccine. Or about the possibility of becoming re-infected.

As the people of God, we turn our attention to prayer, and we endeavor to live in hope, not that everything will return to the way things were. Likely, life as we knew it before will never be fully restored. Rather, we live in the hope that this momentary affliction - that these labor pains we are now experiencing - might give birth to something new. In the throes of these present pains, we recognize that patience is, indeed, a virtue, even as we strive for a more perfect union, a more excellent church, and a more commendable character rooted in practice of self-giving. May God be our guide, and may we never lose hope. Thanks be to God. Amen.