

Text: Romans 8:18–23
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
13 July 2014
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In the overwhelming sadness of tragedies and sufferings, people of faith—like us—naturally turn to our trust in God to carry us through. What people of faith often don't want to admit, though, is that the God we turn to is the same God who did not prevent any of these tragedies or sufferings from happening. Christians aren't comfortable with admitting that, but it's true. The Old Testament is full of stories of God permitting, and sometimes even causing, disasters and punishments to fall upon and overtake his people. St. Paul today, in our reading from his letter to the Romans, comes right out and says that it is God who has subjected the world to futility and suffering. The truth is, God never promises to prevent our personal sufferings. God never promises to avert our personal tragedies. God promised to send us a Savior, a rescuer and he did; he sent Jesus Christ. God promised to send us the Holy Spirit, to give us his strength and presence every day in our walk in life, and he did; St Paul says today that we have in us the firstfruits—the first gifts, the pledge—of the Holy Spirit. God promises to be with us until the end of time, and he is, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God promises us that he has a plan, to make the universe right again; God promises us the future hope of glory, when everyone and everything will be caught up in a loving relationship with him. St. Paul says today that the creation waits eagerly to see this new creation, the revealing of the children of God. But God never promises to prevent our personal sufferings, to stop our tragedies. St. Paul says our sufferings at the present are *nothing* compared to what God has in store of us—but we're still suffering nonetheless. St. Paul says that, even while the Holy Spirit is living in us, we are *groaning* for God to bring his plan to completion, to end human misery and sorrow, and restore the universe to health.

How do we reconcile that God sent us a Savior, that God promises to be with us every day, that God plans to bring us and the entire world into a glorious new creation, with the fact that we are surrounded and touched and affected by such struggles and sadness and sufferings, much of it appearing to be senseless? How can the God we turn to for help, who has promised and done so much, at the same time allow all this to happen?

It's because, while God loves us personally as individuals, God's love is larger than the

individual. God so loved the **world** that he sent his Son. God sends his Son, Jesus Christ, not to save individuals, but to save a world, and to save it ultimately, despite what might happen in the meantime. God's contract, God's covenant, is not with individuals but with the whole of humanity, and God's timeline is not for this small passing day of life, but rather for the eternal day of the world to come. God's plan of rescue in Jesus is played out for the **world**, and that plan is meant to encompass all of earthly history, from the creation of this world to its closing thunders, and only thoroughly completed at the end of time. Our part in that plan, as people of faith, is to tell the story of a God whose love reaches beyond the individual life, beyond the individual moment, beyond the individual pain, beyond the individual event.

That's why we have today's Gospel. Today, in our Gospel, Jesus begins a series of stories to explain how God's kingdom—God's loving and transforming presence—is changing the world. Today's story is about a farmer—the sower—who goes out to sow—to plant—seed: and the sower plants very indiscriminately, as they did it in Jesus' day. No careful rows: the farmer, the sower just throws out the seed in wide arcs, not worrying about where it will land, because he trusts that God will give the growth. God the Father is that farmer, that sower, and the seed he plants is the life-changing news of Jesus Christ—scattered in abundance, freely, with abandon in the world to change the world and bring it into glory. God the Father does this, knowing that that there will be seeming failure in individual plots of ground, but overall the world will be changed through Jesus Christ.

Our individual stories in the larger story of God's love that spans history—our individual stories may be wearying, our individual stories may even involve suffering and death. But that does not mean we are lost to God's love, that God's love is not real or unseen. We are caught up in a love that is more than our individual comfort and experience. God can do **nothing** that is contrary to what He has done in Jesus Christ for the life of the world and what He will continue to do in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ **is** God's **revealed** plan for the world. God does not promise to prevent our sufferings, but God promises himself to us in Jesus Christ. As St. Paul says, "In Jesus Christ every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.'" (2 Cor.1:20)