

Susan B. Anthony

**Romans 8:18-25**

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

**“Can a Crisis Become a Cause?”**

**Rev. Charles Schuster**

**July 17, 2011**

I'd like to thank a member of our congregation for the help that she gave me on this sermon. Alyce Kaehler has got a masters degree in women's studies, and she helped with the research on Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. She doesn't deserve blame if I get it wrong, but she ought to get some credit if I get close to getting it right. Thank you, Alyce.

Romans, Chapter 8. Paul the Apostle wrote it. One of the most important chapters in the Bible. One of the most important thoughts ever written. For in that chapter, we would find all things work for good for those who love God and are called to God's purpose. And we find, "I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing to the glory about to be revealed to us, and creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." All things work for good. Creation waits with eager longing.

Robert Fulgham wrote a book entitled *What on Earth Have I Done?* The title of the book comes from where he lives. He tells us, "My house in Seattle is across the street from an elementary school. A high fence blocks my view, but I'm close enough to overhear conversations, and one morning, as I was out in my yard, at that hour the children were being delivered to school, I heard a car door open and then slam shut, and another door open, and a woman's voice blasting over the fence, 'Billy! What on earth have you done!' What on earth had Billy done? Maybe he spilled a whole bottle of apple juice or opened up his lunch bucket and examined the cookies, or worse, maybe he vomited his breakfast all over himself and had taken most of his clothes off, or perhaps he picked a scab and blood flowed, or with a plastic fork, tattooed his name on the back of his mother's chair, or decorated the upholstery and himself with a red magic marker his mother didn't know he possessed."

Fulgham goes on, "My own mother asked the same question often. I, in turn, have asked my own children, and you no doubt have followed the same line of inquiry with your children. 'What on earth have you done?' This is one of the great mother questions. The second question mothers ask is a theological one. 'What in the name of God are you doing?' Another mother question anticipates the future. 'And what will you think of next?'" Fulgham goes on, "My father rolled all these questions into one. Only the tone changed. 'What the hell?'"

What on earth have you done? What in the name of God are you doing? Some of us had a calm childhood. Not all of us, I know. Some of us have had a calm childhood, early years spent protected, good years. Watched over. All things were good. Life was charmed, and calm. We knew the love and support of family and were surrounded by good friends and healthy relationships. We were cocooned, calmed. Perhaps a quiet place and good food and conversation at dinner. A quiet town, like this one, or a small town with people where everybody knows everybody, and it takes a village to raise a child, and there was a village. Parades and marching bands and picnics and grass and scout troops and boy scouts and girl scouts and Eagle scouts and football games and Friday nights and school dances and get-togethers at the fire hall. You know this town's a little like that, I've discovered. When I grew up you just kind of tried to avoid the police. One day the neighbor across the street from where we lived, there was a police car in her driveway, and I saw her a couple days later and said to her, "That cop at your house giving you trouble?" See I know about tear gas and protest signs and pig blood on government documents, and I've got people who know people, and if they're giving you trouble, just let me know, because we'll get badge numbers, and I get twenty minutes every Sunday in a pulpit, and people listen, some of them, and we could go after them.

I was talking, getting even madder, and she said "The police in this town are good, they're nice, in fact they have this program where you can ride around with them in their cars at night." And then she looked at me and said, "You ought to try that." What a concept. The police are your friend. I love this place. This kind of town. The police are friendly. The mail carriers know your name. There are fireworks on the 4<sup>th</sup> and church on Sunday and youth groups on mission trips, and gathered in a circle singing Kum Ba Ya. I suppose kids in towns like these, where you grew up, I suppose they could get in trouble, you know, they could. Every now and then somebody might carve his or her name on a desk at school with a knife, or somebody sets off a stink bomb in the schools cafeteria. Smells a lot like the food. And once in a while the boys will find a way to look into the girls' locker room at the end of gym class, but they will get caught, and punishment will fit the crime, and then when they get home, all of them, there will be a severe talking-to. But the boys will secretly agree that what they saw exceeded the trouble they got in from seeing it.

I could describe the calm and protected childhood that Jesus had. His childhood in Nazareth is so unremarkable there is not much written about it, only speculation from writers who really don't know, and they describe some things about it. It's written, primarily fiction. His siblings, sisters and brothers, they had their protected time growing in wisdom and stature. He learned a trade from his father, attended worship on the

Sabbath as was his custom (that's what it says) and even preached one time, and the people said, "That's Mary's boy up there, that's Joseph's son." Probably was Youth Sabbath, with the praise band and alternative message I'm guessing.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton grew up with a calm and protected kind of childhood. Her father was a judge. She had brothers, but they died. She wanted to please her father. Her mother was loving and caring. Elizabeth was protected by her father, who thought that women needed protection. Susan B. Anthony you know, you see her face on a dollar coin, or the front of the bulletin, it's the same thing. She grew up in a Quaker house where men and women were thought to be equal in every way. Her parents had conversations about the rights of women. They didn't understand why women couldn't vote or own land. They didn't understand why women were considered less than men. Cocooned and calmed by a life that was protected. Was that the life you had when you were a child? Did you feel safe thinking all things work for good?

Maybe a little naïve, it's possible. That's the downside to that. Jesus said the children belong to God, Jesus said "Bring them to me." and then all those books, all those children's letters to God. You can kind of read the naivete in those. "Dear God, why isn't Mrs. God's name in the Bible? Weren't you married to her when you wrote it?" Good question. "Dear God, there were no clouds on Saturday so I think I saw your feet. Did I really?" "Dear God..." I love this one... "Where does yesterday go? Do you have it?" "Dear God, I'm afraid of things at night more than the day, so if you could keep the sun on a little longer, that would be a good thing."

The innocence of children, the calm of their lives. Time to grow in wisdom and stature, protected, growing up, cocooned, a calm before the storm. Every one of us knows the storm, the crisis. There comes a time when we have a crisis. For some of us, it's when we were young. A time to look at what happened and try to remember, how is it that all things work together for good? I like the story of the West Texas rancher who made an appointment with the local mortician, said he wanted to be buried in his pickup truck. The undertaker tried to talk him out of this bizarre plan. "Why in the world would you want us to do that?" The old cowboy said, "I ain't never seen a hole this old truck couldn't get me out of."

In every life there comes a crisis, and we've got to face it, try to get ourselves out of it. Maybe it's facing our own death, or the death of a loved one. Maybe that's it. Or maybe it's a disappointment, or some time when we weren't treated fairly, or when we became ill. A crisis hits us, and the world changes for us. It isn't what we thought it was, and we're appalled. Our eyes are opened, and we're not naïve any more. And we made these plans, but we have to shift our plans and adjust our dreams, because things that were, aren't. Possibilities that came, vanished. In every life, a crisis. For Jesus, it could have been when his father died, and he had to take on the family business. Might have been then. Or it could have been at the wedding, when his mother told him to turn the water into wine. It could have been when he realized Judas would betray him. What do we do in a crisis? We cope. We deal with it. We think long and hard about it.

In the early years, some know the calm of protection, and then a crisis hits, and from that there is a cause, a cause that defines our lives, perhaps. I have to admit, I don't completely understand Charles Colson's theology, but I do understand what happened to him. Caught up in the Nixon White House scandal, Watergate, put in prison, changed his life because he found a cause. His books, his speaking engagements, his life changed because he got a cause, and he would tell you, "My greatest humiliation, being sent to prison, was the beginning of God's greatest use of my life. The real legacy of my life was my biggest failure." It's a cause you take on. It becomes your life. Susan B. Anthony said, "Failure is not an option." Elizabeth Cady Stanton, she said the same thing, repeated it, "Failure is not an option."

Frank Lloyd Wright got a call one night, famous architect. He had designed this house for these people, and they had just moved into it. He got a call in the middle of the night. They said it was raining, and the roof leaked. Kind of like the church here, the roof leaked. And their living room was flooded. What should they do? And he said, "Rise above it." A crisis comes and we rise above it. Elizabeth Cady Stanton went to a conference on slavery. They wouldn't let her attend because she was a woman. Elizabeth Cady Stanton rose above it. She got a cause. Susan B. Anthony voted. She voted in the presidential election of 1872, and was arrested, because women couldn't vote, and at the trial she said, "I stand before you indicted for allegedly the crime of having voted."

There's a crisis in every life. A young woman who grew up in what looked like a normal home, whatever that is, a happy home, a young woman who excelled in every way, was given the crown of beauty, Miss America, her parents prominent in society. She was beautiful and bright, wealthy family. Olinger's mortuary in Denver, charmed life. The crisis his when she was young, and her father began sexually abusing her, and her life was anything but charmed. As you learn about Marilyn Van Derbur, found a way to rise above it, and from her crisis came her cause, the Kemp Foundaiton for women who have been sexually abused. A cause.

Some of you will recall it, because you were there, as I remember it, the day he came to Fort Collins and spoke at the Lincoln Center, he had worked hard to get where he was, and when you think about where he started as a child, as an infant, he was abandoned by his parents. His mother took him and put him at the doorstep of the Baptist minister, who later adopted him, Art Linkletter. He remembers a lot of things about his life, but the think he will never forget is that day when he was at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs to give the commencement address, and he got a call from his son, telling him his daughter had committed suicide, jumped out a window? Why? Drugs given by her psychologist, teacher, self-styled guru who said LSD is good for people. It isn't. Diane was her name, 20 years old. Up-and-coming beautiful young star, bright. October 1969, Art Linkletter was bitter until he got a letter. He got a letter from Norman Vincent Peale who told him to do something positive with Diane's tragedy, and so he did. And so he does. He wrote a book entitled *Drugs at my Doorstep*. Until the very day he died, he would come and speak to people about the danger of drugs, and he would speak to young people who were caught up in that, telling them to get off of it, and how they could get

off of it. It changed his life. He had a cause. That's what he said to us, that day at the Lincoln Center.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton couldn't get into a conference because she was a woman. Her crisis became her cause. "The older I get, the greater power I seem to have. I'm like a snowball. The further I'm rolled, the more I gain." Cautious, careful people always casting about to preserve their reputations never effect reforms, she said. Susan B. Anthony, "Men, their rights, nothing more, women, their rights, nothing less." Our democratic republican government is based on the idea of the natural right of every individual member thereof to voice and to vote in making and executing the laws. Jesus' cause was religion, and faith, he thought it ought to be available to people, and he tipped over the tables of the money-changers because they were blocking people out of it from God.

What is your cause? Blaise Pascal said it in a prayer. "Lord, " he said, "help us do great things as though they were little, since we do them with your power, and help us to do little things as though they were great, since we do them in your name." What is your cause? There's an African-American judge in Washington DC, Mary Terrell is her name, her cause is tea parties. No, not the political group that's been elected that's helping the President balance the budget, it's a different group. Tea parties for young women. She invites young women from the ghetto to tea parties, so that they can experience a different world. "High tea" in great hotels. Field trips to museums, plays with professional women who serve as mentors, speakers who talk to them about journaling and nutrition and how to write and deliver speeches, and tours of college campuses. And it heightens their expectations. She's got a cause. She says, "As a judge, I can detain and deter, and use enforcement, or I can intervene and try to make a difference. I know these children have the potential to become great. All they need is someone to give them a hand, to reach out and give them some confidence." That's her cause.

Friday is my day to go to the hospital. I notice a lot of people check out of the hospital on Friday, before I can get there. I think they know I'm coming. I'm really not very good at hospital visitation. Some of you know that first-hand. You'll tell me what you've got, and I'll say, "That's terrible, oh my." Got a C-minus in that class in seminary. I don't do well with the sight of blood. Friday, visiting one of our church members, when this woman came in to clean the room. If Santa Claus had a wife, this woman would qualify. She was about as wide as she is tall, and her name is Chris, and she cleaned the room. But it was the way she cleaned it. She knew her job, and it wasn't just floors and trash cans. It was the patient. She made Linda, the patient, feel as though she mattered, and that it was a privilege to clean her room. She pushed that swifter mop around the room like she was dancing with Fred Astaire, and when she left the room, Linda had a smile on her face and a twinkle in her eye. Chris was good as medicine. She made you feel good about life. It is her cause. Probably comes from a crisis, I don't know. But it is her cause, to care for the people in the room when she cleans it.

Every one of us has a chance to turn a crisis into a cause. Oh, we can glide through our days, or live them out without purpose. We can think that there's nothing that matters, or

we can realize that something is being asked of us. How do we answer those questions, though? What on earth have we done? What in the name of God are we doing? Creation waits with eager longing for our answer, and if we don't have an answer, if we lose our purpose, in the words of Robert Fulgham's father, what the hell?