

In Anguish for Delivery

Revelation 12:1-3

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I had a really hard week.

I can't tell you all the things that happened in my week, but I'm *really exhausted*. So what I'd like to do is for us to pray a little while, and then we're going to end early.

I know what some of you are thinking: "Well, you ought to preach anyway! We all had hard weeks." If that's you, I want to say to you, you don't understand. *You don't know*. You're not me.

You don't know what it's like to be a pastor of a large church with crises and confidences you have to keep.

You don't know what it is to be a boss to a bunch of people in this Christian fishbowl, and you're supposed to hold them accountable and be liked by everybody at the same time.

You don't know what it is to preach week after week for nine years, to feel as if you get up and *bleed* on people . . . spill your heart, and then they criticize and step on it.

Then next week you have to go right back, sit in your office, and wonder what God wants to say to everybody . . . a "fresh word" from God. You stare at some text that is utterly confusing, and if you kind of understand it, then you have to serve it up simple to everybody.

You don't know. It's a lonely place. I'm exhausted, tired, frustrated . . . accountable to God and to you and to a Session and to a wife and to four little kids . . . sometimes I sit there in my office in absolute *anguish*.

The two pastors at the churches where I was before this one both ran from that anguish into a string of illicit affairs. My old friend who I knew from high school and who was a pastor in Missouri ran from that anguish by sitting in his garage and asphyxiating himself, leaving his wife and kids behind.

So who are *you* to tell me what I should do? *You don't know*. You're not me.

I imagine some of you are worried about me right now. Some of you are probably mad at me. You say:

That's *great*. But preacher, you're not me. I'm here. You don't know what it is to be me. You don't understand. You don't know what it is to be diagnosed with cancer and be given a few months to live. You don't know what it is to be married to *my* spouse. You don't know what it is to live with the anguish *I* have from *my* past, but *I'm* still here! You don't know what it is to live with chronic fatigue and pain! *You* don't know me! *You're* not me! You don't understand. *Nobody* understands . . . *God* doesn't understand!

He doesn't know what it's like to be me, to be poor and oppressed, to be born into filth and live in an oppressed country, to be rejected and denied and reviled by church and by friends and by family, to lose your own father and to feel sometimes like the weight of the world—the sin and shame—is heaped on your back, to feel forsaken by God! How would *God* know what it is to be forsaken by God, to feel like you've been stripped and beaten and nailed to the wall naked — crucified!?"

Wait a minute. Maybe He *does*.

Sydney Carter wrote a poem that goes like this:

But God is up in heaven
And he doesn't do a thing,
With a million angels watching,
And they never move a wing. . . .
It's God they ought to crucify
Instead of you and me,
I said to this Carpenter
A-hanging on the tree.

And now I had better stop for a minute; some of you may still be worried about me. I'm *fine*. Don't be worried. Some of you may still be mad. Don't be! I'm sorry. And some of you realize that I'm lying about not preaching, for, in fact, *I am*.

So far in The Revelation we have seen incredible anguish. For the last eight chapters — *anguish*. And it's all been a part of opening this incredible scroll in order to deliver its Word. And now the scroll is open.

Revelation 12:1: *And a great portent [a sign] appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery.*

And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a

third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

(In verses 7-13 there is a great war in the heavenlies, and Satan is cast down.)

And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.

The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth.

Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. And the dragon stood on the sand of the sea.

So the scroll is opened, with all heaven and creation wondering what's in it, and a woman delivers a baby. Almost all Bible teachers are unanimous on the identity of that baby. It's the Word of God, Jesus. But who is this *woman*? That's the confusing part.

Catholic theologians have argued that she's Mary. But she's kind of *large* for Mary.

Some argue that the woman is Eve, and that makes some sense. If you'll remember, long ago Eve had a run-in with the dragon in the garden.

He tempted her,
 she fell,
 along with Adam;
God shows up,
 curses the dragon,
 and casts it to the earth saying,

“You will crawl on your belly all the days of your life.” Then He says, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed, Dragon, and hers. And *he* [her seed] will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.” Then God said to Eve, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth.” *Anguish*. “The seed will save you, Eve, and you will give birth to the seed in anguish” (Genesis 3).

It's pretty clear that Jesus *is* that promised seed. But technically, Eve didn't give birth to Jesus, except through a long line—a genealogy—a lineage—a bunch of other mothers. So some people have argued that that woman is that genealogy, or that the woman is Israel.

The woman is clothed with the “sun, moon, and stars.” Joseph had a dream of his family in which they were “sun, moon and stars.” So it seems the woman must *at least* be Israel, and *at least* Eve, and *at least* Mary, and somehow that genealogy from Eve to Mary.

By the way, that genealogy makes for some rather sordid ancestors and mothers in Jesus' past. It starts off with Eve, the mother of all sinners, the original sinner. Then Abraham pimped his wife. David, Jesus' great– great– great– grandfather, murdered the husband of Jesus' great– great– great– grandmother Bathsheba, so he could have sex with her.

Then there's a host of lesser-known sinners like Rahab, the Gentile harlot. (Jesus had quite a bit of Gentile blood, it seems.) Jesus was of the house of Judah, but that was only because his great– great– great– great– grandmother Tamar disguised herself as a hooker and got her father-in-law Judah to have sex with her.

It's quite a lineage. And just like the stable where Jesus was born, Jesus doesn't seem all that concerned about hiding the mess.

Philip Yancey wrote in one of his books, “These shady ancestors show that Jesus entered human history in the raw, a willing descendant of its shame. In contrast, Herod the Great, reigning king at Jesus' birth, had his genealogical records destroyed out of vanity.”

Just think of it:

The promised seed from God Himself implanted in poor, teen-age, peasant flesh from that lineage; then born in desperation and confusion in a stinking barn in an occupied and oppressed country.

That must have been *incredible anguish!*

So maybe He *does* know what it's like. Maybe He really did empty Himself and take the form of a slave. Maybe He really is born of the woman in anguish. Maybe He really *did* wrap Himself in flesh like mine and . . . had gas and heartburn . . . and smelled like gym socks after a long hike . . . and when He was tired He was tempted to sleep with Mary Magdalene . . . get drunk on that new wine . . . go to bed and stay in bed and never preach! Maybe He was tempted like that, or do you not believe that He was “tempted in every way, as we are, yet without sin”?

Some would argue, then, that the woman in Revelation 12 is Israel, or the genealogy of Jesus. Yet after the child is taken up into heaven, this woman has more kids. These children bear testimony to Jesus, and that hardly sounds like Israel, at least the Israel we

normally think of. Yet you must remember that Paul and John taught that we—the church— *are* Israel.

But we are Jesus' brothers and sisters, right? . . . not mother. Jesus said, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50). Believers, you *are* Christ's brothers and sisters, and that means you have the same father as Jesus. But that also means you have the same *mother* as Jesus, and you *are* that mother!

(Sounds like the ultimate, red-neck family tree, doesn't it? — no branches.)

But that's what Jesus said: "Whoever does the will of my Father is . . . my mother." He told us who His mother was. So then the woman must be God's people throughout time . . . whoever does the will of the Father throughout time.

Jesus was born in his flesh, in space and time, in Bethlehem of Judea, to Mary the virgin. Yet in Revelation 12 it seems to refer to more than simply Jesus' birth to Mary in Bethlehem . . . and to more than His life in Palestine . . . and to more than His ascension in Acts 1. (In verse 5 he is caught up to the throne, and it doesn't even mention the cross.)

In what way could Jesus be born and live and ascend more than once in Bethlehem and Palestine? How is it that Paul could write that He was tempted in every way as I am and you are? He's never been raped as a woman! He's never had to moderate a Session meeting during a budget crisis! And how is it that *I* could be His mother? How could I be that woman in Revelation 12?

The seven churches in Asia Minor were next door to the province of Galatia. So these churches that received The Revelation probably had Galatians as well as Ephesians and Colossians. In Galatians Paul writes, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." Well, how did He *get* there? Paul goes on to tell the Galatians that he—Paul—is in travail—birth pangs—*with* them "until Christ be formed in them." Like Jesus said, His followers are His mother . . . which seems to mean Jesus is born of you all somehow, impregnated with the seed ["sperma" in Greek] of God the Father, Word of God the Father.

Jesus born of you as mother,
And born in you,
Formed in you,
The Bethlehem of your heart.

That seems weird, yet it's what we sing at Christmastime. "Oh holy child of Bethlehem descend to us we pray, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today." It's not just a song.

In I John 3 John writes that God's seed ["sperma"] is in us who belong to Him. In the Gospel of John Jesus says to Nicodemus, "You must be born again." We throw that phrase around so easily now days. I think we've come to believe that being "born again" is an easy, instantaneous process. Well, after four kids I know it's not such an easy, instantaneous process. The fertilization, on the other hand, is rather instantaneous and easy. Maybe fertilization, receiving the seed—the Word, is the instantaneous, easy process, but pregnancy and delivery can really hurt and last a while! Maybe we should expect some born-again birth pains! *Anguish.*

The woman is in anguish to deliver. In fact, it's such anguish we really can't do it. "We're born of the spirit," Jesus says, the Spirit of Jesus. The Word is the seed implanted in us, and we're born together with Him.

The *me* that's born again is *Him* in me.
"No longer I who live but Christ in me."
Christ in me is to live.
He's born of me in me — the *new me*.

In Matthew 24 Jesus sits his disciples down and talks of wars and rumors of wars; of earthquakes and famines. He basically talks about all the broken seals and trumpets we've been looking at in The Revelation. Then He calls them *birth pangs*.

Well, who's being born?

In Romans 8 Paul writes this: "The entire creation and we ourselves groan as in labor"—travail—birth pangs. Who's being born? — According to Paul, the sons of glory . . . you guys . . . us . . . the church . . . the body of Christ. Christ in us is being born.

In Revelation 12 the woman—us—is clothed with sun, moon, and stars, clothed with creation. The creation is like our delivery room. Creation and the woman in anguish to deliver. Jesus is born *of you* and *in you* . . . in anguish.

Last year at the Living Stone Service a friend got up and shared a vision she had had. She described this stable; she said it was like the one in Bethlehem. It was poor, unkempt, run-down, and full of filth and issues of blood.

She said, "As I looked at the stable, in the midst of it enthroned I saw Him in all His beauty—the Lord Jesus. That stable is our hearts. His life is born in my filthy, anguished stable."

So He knows. He understands. He feels what His body feels. I am His body. You *are* His body. He was born into His earthly flesh in Bethlehem of Judea, but He's also born into *my* body here in Golden. And that's wonderful news, because that means that I'm known, and I *am not* alone. That is wonderful news! And it's also very challenging news.

Because I can never say to Him,
“You’re not me!” because He *is*,
Or “You don’t understand!” because He *does*.

When He tells me to do something like preach and get up off my lazy tail and endure, I can’t use those old lines and excuses on Him.

We all long to be known, yet we all hang on to *not* being known, because we use our secret anguish as an excuse and justification for sin. Yet when we do that, it traps us deeper and deeper into defeat, sin, loneliness, and more anguish. No one can speak into our anguish. The dragon knows that.

So we say things like this:

Nobody knows my sufferings and sorrows! Nobody knows what it’s like to be me. So nobody can tell me to stop drinking! Or stop eating or stop using porn or stop gossiping. No one can tell *me* that I have to forgive them. *They* don’t know what it’s like! No one can tell me that I can’t hate.

No one can tell me that I have to “faithfully endure all the way unto death,” as in Smyrna. Or that I have to stop “sleeping with Jezebel,” like in Thyatira, or “hold fast in poverty and weakness,” as in Philadelphia. No one can tell me!

Wrong. Jesus can. He has authority to speak into your anguish because He is born in your anguish. *Of course* He writes, “My seven churches, I know your works, and I know your tribulations, and I know where you dwell. It’s where I dwell.”

At the Living Stone Service my friend continued, saying something like this: “Jesus is in that stable (your heart) and will stay if you’ve asked Him there. But He wants you to renounce your sins so together you can clean up His temple.”

The Ark is in the temple.

He is born in anguish, *into* the anguish,
to deliver us from our anguish.

In Revelation Christ addresses the “Spirit” or “Angel” in the seven churches. I suspect the Angel is His own Spirit born in them, into their mess and anguish, in order to deliver them.

Babies are born in anguish ever since that day in the garden long ago when God prescribed anguish in delivery. The woman in Revelation 12 is in *anguish* to be delivered.

When we deny the anguish in our hearts
and don’t face it,
When we deny our own shame

and failure and sin,
When we hang on to that anguish
like a weapon against God,
When we use those places of secret anguish
like a trump card for the day of judgment,
("Oh, yeah, God, *you* don't know what it's like! *You're* not me!")
When we refuse to surrender our places of anguish
to Jesus . . .

We refuse the birth of His life in our lives. For the Christ is born into those places of anguish. "You will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes [old rags], and lying in your manger."

So many people want to see the King of Glory but they won't be caught *dead* in a stable, especially their own stable. It's too humiliating.

We say, "Why is He born *there*? Why does He have to start there?"

A man pulled into a gas station to ask for directions. (Some people think that is a miracle in and of itself . . .) The man said to the gas station attendant, "How do I get to Boston from here?" The attendant looked at him and said, "Well, if *I* was going to Boston, I certainly wouldn't start here."

"Why do we have to start *here* in anguish?" Because that's where we are, ever since the Fall. So that's where Christ is born in us, and that's *who* Christ is — the Savior . . . Son of God and Son of Man. He came to bear our sins and sorrows and anguish, so you'll find Him wrapped in rags and lying in your stable. You see, it is part of *who He is*.

I have a friend that was tied up and tortured and raped by two men she had trusted and loved. It was the culmination of many, many things, and she felt she was to blame. She carried unspeakable shame. That event happened decades ago. It was an anguish into which she did not have the strength to look.

Years and years ago she went to a church service. Very simply she received the Word of God—she received Christ into her heart. He was the seed that was planted there, and He grew there. Eventually He gave her the strength to look into that place of anguish. But she *still* didn't want to surrender to Him in prayer and confession . . . such shame and fear there.

A place like that surely gives you a reason to hate, doesn't it? Hanging on to it gives you a reason not to forgive. It gives you a reason to despise yourself and resent God. You can hold it like a weapon against God, and our hearts are so incredibly deceitful that way, we can hold that thing against the God we say we love and not even know it.

It's been very hard, but she has prayed through that place of incredible anguish, laying down hatred and vengeance, and surrendering it to Christ. A few weeks ago she called me. She was so excited. She said, "Peter, I just want to tell you that last night I had the most *real* dream! I dreamed of Jesus, and it started in that place," and she described it to me:

I was tied up there, and then He appeared. He was wearing this white robe. He walked up to me and untied me from the bed to which I was tied. He bent down and picked me up, and He carried me over to the side of the room and sat me down in a chair. He looked in my eyes and said, "Honey, I'm here to protect your heart and your spirit."

(I believe her heart and spirit are caught up to God and to His throne with Jesus — Revelation 12:5.)

Then Jesus took off His white robe. He wrapped it around me. And I felt entirely safe. Then from that place of safety I watched as Jesus walked over to that bed and laid down on that bed where I had lain, and He tied Himself to the bed.

Then I watched as they came in and did everything to Jesus that they had done to me.

I am convinced that that dream is more real than the chair you are sitting on right now. For my friend *is* the body of Christ, and her anguish *is* His anguish. Her suffering *is* His suffering. Her guilt *is* His guilt — He took it on the cross. And He's shown her that her scars are on *His body!* They are *His!*

Never be ashamed of *His scars*.

Who He is is born of her anguish . . . and *your* anguish . . . and *my* anguish. We are His body.

So to see Christ, surrender your anguish.

He hangs on your cross,
And He is born in your stable.

Don't use your place of anguish as an excuse for sin. Confess your anguish and sin, and be obedient to Him in that place of anguish, because behold! Christ is born in anguish . . . *of* anguish.

The woman is in anguish to deliver . . .
Christ in you . . .
the Word in you.

It almost seems silly comparing my anguish to my friend's anguish and some of your anguish, but since you're here, probably most of you have encountered the Word, which

is Jesus, somewhere in my preaching. And a few people think it just *happens* . . . that God kind of zaps it down. (My brother-in-law said to me a few weeks ago, “Well, what do you *do* during the week?”)

I think I should tell you that almost always I sit in my office during the week, and I struggle and I scratch, and my honest prayer is, “God, what the #@!* are You doing?” And I want to run from the anguish. Yet now, after these years, I have to admit this, although it scares me: the Word is born in my anguish. When I am weak, He is strong. **I come to see the Savior in the very place where I need to be saved.** I surrender my anguish, and then it’s *His* anguish. And He conquers it. That’s what He does; that’s who He is. I see Him as Savior born of that anguish.

So He knows all my anguish because it’s *His* anguish. But if it’s *His* anguish, it’s His eternally and always, which means it was *His* anguish before I was even born. So this is the deeper truth: not that He’s come to know *my* anguish, but He is allowing me to taste *His*, the anguish of loving a fallen world . . . *and* the joy of redeeming it.

Listen to John 16. Jesus said, “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

When my oldest son Jonathan was born, my wife had an incredibly hard time. She had a ruptured placenta, Jon was 5 1/2 weeks early, we didn’t even know where the hospital was, she had twenty-four hours of absolutely intense labor . . . we did not know if Jonathan would live. And I wasn’t sure my wife would live.

I remember there was blood everywhere, and she was passing out on the table from the pain and exhaustion. I honestly don’t think I have ever seen a person in such anguish. I remember thinking to myself, “Well, you had better enjoy *this* baby, if he lives, because you’ll never have another one.”

As the doctor pulled Jonathan out and held him up in front of my wife, bloody and screaming, she looked at him. The very first words out of her mouth were these: “Oh! I want another one!” *Joy!*

Your anguish, sorrow, suffering, and guilt
Can be your own private hell,
Or it can be the birthplace of the King of Glory.

Surrender your anguish,
And soon you will see Him.
And no one will *ever* be able
To take your joy away from you!

“Father, we are so frightened by our anguish we run from it. We run from it in other people; we run from it in your church around the world, Lord Jesus. Even those of us who have known You for a long time — there are places in our lives where we run from the anguish where You long to be born in all Your fullness, more of Your life in us. And we *hold* the anguish as resentment and a weapon against You.

“So, Lord God, I know we don’t have much time, but I pray that right now and this week You would help us to surrender all that anguish to You. God, help us to pray with people and confess it to You. Lord, we have a Prayer Team; I pray that people would use the Prayer Team, that You may have that place of anguish.”

We all have some anguish. Let’s pray a very dangerous prayer, the Christmas prayer: “Be born in me, Lord Jesus.”

[Song: “O Little Town of Bethlehem.”]

If you’ve never asked Christ into your heart, don’t be afraid. He wants to bring joy to you . . . unspeakable joy.

If you *have* asked Christ into your heart, and that Word is implanted in your heart, Christ is born there, and He is growing there. He is giving birth to life there, and sometimes it really hurts. We have anguish in our lives, but if we surrender that anguish, there is incredible news: that anguish is not a messenger of death; it’s *life!* And you hurt because joy is being born into you forevermore. It’s Christmas. Joy to you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Further Reading

So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [seed] and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. . . ."

-Genesis 3:14-16

Then he [Joseph] dreamed another dream, and told it to his brothers, and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream; and behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

-Genesis 37:9

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon [great serpent], with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads.

-Revelation 12:1-3

But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

-Matthew 1:20-21

. . . it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in travail; for the children of the desolate one are many more than the children of her that is married."

-Galatians 2:20, 4:19-27

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which

is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew'. . . ."

-John 3:5-7

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed [sperma] remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. . . . We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

-I John 3:9-10, 14

You have been born anew, not of perishable seed [sperma] but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God

-I Peter 1:23

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" And Jesus answered them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs. . . ."

-Matthew 24:3-8

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

-Romans 8:22-23

The first thing that Jesus promises is suffering: "I tell you . . . you will be weeping and wailing . . . and you will be sorrowful." But he calls these pains birth pains. And so, what seems a hindrance becomes a way; what seems an obstacle becomes a door; and what seems a misfit becomes a cornerstone. Jesus changes our history from a random series of sad incidents and accidents into a constant opportunity for a change of heart.

-Henri Nouwen

There is at the center of reality a groan. And the closer to the center you live, the more you will hear it and the more you will share in it: the center of the creation, the center of the church, the center of ministry, the center of those things that belong to the people of God, and the center of the human race. The closer you move there, the more you will hear the groan--the more you will share the groan. And you will recognize it. . . . Paul says that the groan in creation, in us, in God is a groan not of death, not the death throes; but a groan of childbirth. God is giving birth to something new. God is doing something

fresh. God is creating new heaven, new earth, and by the time I have mastered the groan I will have to exchange it--for a WOW!

-Fred Craddock

. . . the wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated his new creation.

-Henri Nouwen

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. . . .”

-John 16:20-22