

## **How to Have a Baby**

John 16:16-33

Pastor Peter Hiatt

October 29, 2006

[A movie clip is shown from “Big Fish.” A baby is born, slips through the hands of the doctor, and slides down the length of the hallway.]

August 27, 1988, having just returned from a youth group trip, in my bedroom in my new home in Danville, California where I was the new Youth Pastor, I was practicing my guitar. My wife Susan yelled from the bathroom, “Peter if you keep up that racket, I’ll go into labor right here.” I played louder... then I heard a scream. I ran into the bathroom to find Susan standing over a pool of crimson liquid. She told me her water had broken, but it wasn’t just water. There was blood—a lot of blood.

She was 5½ weeks early. We had just moved to Danville 8 weeks prior to this. We’d only been to one Lamaze class where all we did was learn the other couples’ names.

I didn’t even know where the hospital was. We called for directions, ran (and waddled) to the car. I fulfilled my lifelong dream of driving without a speed limit, yet I didn’t enjoy it because of fear. We’d waited so long for this baby. Would the baby live? Would my wife live?

When we got to the hospital it was literally like a M.A.S.H. unit under siege. Every woman in Walnut Creek was having a baby.

They put us through triage, then placed Susan on a gurney in the hallway. They ran a multitude of tests. (Her placenta had ripped.) Then they placed her in a room with

about 8 other women in hard labor. The woman next to Susan kept yelling, "Allah, Allah, Allah."

Well, when my wife Susan is in travail she doesn't yell... she turns into Clint Eastwood. At one point I remember she pointed her finger at me. Eyes focused, teeth clenched, she motioned like this. It meant, "Come here, punk." She got me right up close, next to her face and through clenched teeth she demanded, "I want drugs!"

I said, "Well honey, we wanted to have a baby natural... like the Indians, and we paid the \$200 for the Lamaze class." She grabbed my collar, pulled me close and screamed, "NOW!" and I obeyed.

Now many of you are pregnant or considering pregnancy, and I don't want to scare you. Our first delivery was unusually difficult. But it is my Christian duty to warn all the young men out there: They change... from ribbons and bows to Clint Eastwood.

Well, Susan was in labor a long time. The doctors actually wanted to postpone delivery for they said the contractions, the labor pain, actually prepared the baby for birth.

I kept asking, "How much longer?" Susan kept asking, "How much longer?" And they kept saying stuff like, "A little while," just "a little while." Well, what does "a little while" mean?

Finally, after 22 hours of labor, ten of which were very hard labor, she was ready to deliver. They took her into the operating room, put a bucket below her to catch the blood. Susan kept passing out from exhaustion, loss of blood, and pain. They'd wake her and say, "Push." Honestly, I have never, ever seen another person in that much pain.

I remember thinking, "You better enjoy this baby,

‘cause there’s just about a snowball’s chance in Hell that you’ll ever have another one—this is just too stinkin’ painful.”

Well, finally after 22 hours of tribulation, the doctor held him in the air—our 5 pound scrawny, little, black-eyed, cone-headed, baby boy, the greatest thing I’d ever made or that God had made through me. We called him Scooter ‘cause we hadn’t picked out a name yet. Now we call him Jonathan—it means “Gift of God.”

The doctor held him up—and now this is the really weird thing—after 22 hours of tribulation, confusion, mess, and horrific pain, I looked at Susan, and she’s smiling from ear to ear (as if the 22 hours never happened). Smiling from ear to ear and the first thing out of her mouth was this, “Oh... I want another one.” Well that’s psycho!!!!

Some of you think the Christian life is like that: “Take up your cross,” and “Rejoice always!” And if that’s what you think, you’re right.

John 16:16-22, 23, these are Jesus’ last words to His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane before He is crucified.

*“A little while, and you will see me no longer, and again a little while, and you will see me.” So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father?’” So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is*

*this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'? 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 giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered her baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. [Verse 33] I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*

"Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." That's nice. But like the disciples, like Susan in the maternity ward, we want to know, "How long is 'a little while'?"

Scholars debate how long this "little while" is. Is it the three days before the resurrection or all of time before the second coming—the end of the world. Jesus seems to be referring to Old Testament prophecies about what the Jews called "the birth pains of the Messiah" and those prophecies seem to refer to the resurrection *and* the end of the world.

Remember in Matthew Jesus talks about great tribulation. Then he calls this "tribulation" birth pains.

Then he says it's a sign that the Son of Man is near—a "little while."

Then he says it will happen in "that generation"—that *lifetime*, by the end of their time, their life time.

It's like "the little while" ended on Easter morning for Jesus and yet "the little while" lasts as long as our life in this world.

Well, maybe the thing that makes "the little while" little isn't the clock (whether it's three days or 2000 years) it's something else.

When the doctor held up our baby boy and Susan's eyes lit up and she said, "I want another one" suddenly 22 hours became "a little while."

The time is near. Soon your eyes will light up and this fallen world will seem to be but "a little while."

Recently on a really hard night, after I had complained to my wife about a variety of struggles I faced, she woke me up and said, "Peter I keep hearing God say, 'The night is almost over. The night is almost over.'"

I should have been grateful, but I looked at her and I said, "How long is almost? What does 'almost' mean to God? What does 'almost' mean to someone named, 'I AM' who exists outside of time? How long is 'almost'?"

Well, I suspect the answer does not lie in seeing a clock. The answer lies in seeing Jesus—faith in Jesus. That is, the "little while" is "little" not because of a clock; the "little while" is "little" because of what or who is being produced.

So these men asked Jesus, “How long is a ‘little while’?” And Jesus told them about a woman giving birth to a baby.

Something [no same thing]... somebody is about to be born.

My sister, Rachel, is an Emergency Room nurse down at Porter. She sent me a list of real life doctors’ notes. This notation was from Dr. Mark MacDonald of San Antonio, Texas.

A man comes into the ER and yells, “My wife’s going to have her baby in the cab!” I grabbed my stuff, rushed out to the cab, lifted the lady’s dress, and began to take off her underwear. Suddenly I noticed that there were several cabs, and I was in the wrong one.

No point to that story, other than to say, sometimes it’s important to know who the mother is, and likewise, who it is that’s being born.

Who’s being born? Well, obviously Jesus is being born. He’s talking about his death and resurrection. Scripture calls Jesus “first born from the dead.” So Jesus was born *into* this world and born *out of* this world: a cross and an empty tomb here, but Christmas—new birth someplace else.

His tomb was a tomb-womb, and although it looks like death, it’s really a birth.

Jesus is saying, “Guys it’s gonna get confusing, messy, and painful. It’s gonna look like death, but it’s really a birth.”

When my Dad died, I really struggled with wanting to die too. Not because I’m a masochist, but because of the

overwhelming sensation that I had just witnessed a birth from inside the womb and that there was a great party being thrown somewhere else.

Well, Jesus is born, and we're being born. Isaiah prophesied of the birth pains of the Messiah then said, "And the earth will give birth to the dead."

You remember that when Jesus died, the tombs were opened and formerly dead folks started walking around Jerusalem. (Matt. 27:52-53) Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again to enter the kingdom."

Jesus is called, "Firstborn among many brethren." We must be those brethren. He is also called "Firstborn of all creation." Paul writes that "all creation groans in birth pains waiting for the revealing of the sons of God." It's like this whole creation is a womb, and Jesus was the first one born out of it.

You know, if this world is a womb, I bet ya there are things which seem unimportant here that are most important somewhere else—things like faith, hope, love, truth. They seem superfluous in this womb of a world—just like hands, feet, mouth and a nose would seem superfluous to a baby in a womb. That's because they've been made for another world where...

Those hands will play with toy cars and hold balloons.

Those feet will push pedals on bikes and go for hikes.

That mouth will speak words and drink cold cups of water.

That nose will smell birthday cake, punch, bread and wine.

Well, this is a womb of a world. So the things which seem unimportant here are most important there, and the things that seem so very important here are least important there. I mean, to a baby that umbilical cord must be everything—oxygen, nourishment, life. But, when my son was born, they had me cut it off and throw it in the trash. Now all that's left is a hairy belly button on an 18 year old young man. He considers it rather foolish—superfluous.

There are things in this world that you think are pretty important—breath, food, houses, money. You think that without them you'd die, but maybe you'd be born.

When my last son was born, he was born blue and could've died. The umbilical cord was wrapped twice around his neck. The thing that brought him life in the womb world was strangling him in the real world. Praise God the doctors saw it and cut the cord.

Maybe you need to cut the cord.

Well, Jesus is saying, "Guys, it's a womb world. Don't get tangled up in it. And soon, very soon it's gonna start squeezing you, pressing you, tribulating you. That's not a bad sign. It's a good sign—labor pain, someone's getting born."

You know, it hurts to give birth, but it really hurts to be born. Susan was sore, but you should've seen Jonathan—naked, bloody, and bruised.

Jesus came into this world  
 naked,  
     bloody, and  
         bruised,



and it's how he went out, how he was born out,  
 naked,  
     bloody, and  
     bruised.

You know, He is the head (that's what scripture tells us). He is the head, and we are His body.

When Jonathan was born his head (The Head) came out first. That's how it's supposed to happen, and it's kind of weird... just the head. I'm, like, "Hey who are you and what're you doing down there?"

Kind of like the last place you'd expect.

(Jesus shows up in the last place you'd expect sometimes.)

Well, his head was born first, and that's really the hard part, the brutal part. I mean that was "The Passion of the Jonathan"... the head, then it took just "a little while" and the body followed (kinda plopped out). Well, we're kind of like that body being born.

The head is out.

The body is still in.

Yet the body is attached to the Head.

The body will follow the Head.

And if the body is surrendered to the Head

(has faith in the Head),

it can be nourished by the Head,

nourished with the atmosphere of another world even while it's being born out of this world.

Well, Jesus is born, and we are getting born. This world is like a womb, and we are the mother.

That's what Jesus said in Matthew 12. "Here are my mother and my brothers," as He pointed to His disciples.

They are Mother Church. The brothers and sisters give birth to Jesus in each other. They are Mother Church... the woman in Revelation 12 who gives birth to Christ and then to his brethren.

Paul wrote, "The Jerusalem above is our mother." The Jerusalem above is the True Church—the true us—the bride of Christ. In Galatians Paul writes, "I'm in travail [the anguish of childbirth] until Christ is formed in you." Paul is saying that he's giving birth to Christ in them, and they will give birth to Christ in others.

We think that's all just metaphor. But maybe physical birth in this world is more like the metaphor, and being born from above is what's truly real. Christ is what's truly real. And who is Christ? Really?

He is:

The Eternal Seed planted in broken and dirty soil,  
the womb of our hearts.

The Word spoken into our chaos,

The Meaning spoken into our pain.

The Light that shines in our darkness.

The Way that appears where there is no way.

The Truth born into our lies.

The Life born into our death.

The Grace of God born out of our sin.

The Mercy of God born out of our shame.

The Triumph of God born out of our failure.

He is the Prince of Peace born into our fear.

He is God born in our stinkin' manger.

He is the Son of God (the Father)

and Son of Man (the Mother).

Man is the Son of Man's Mother.  
 He is born through us and of us,  
     born out of our pain.  
 And He is born of us (like Mary)  
     through us (like Paul) and  
     born in us.  
 We are His body.

And that, my friends, is not a metaphor but reality.

So Jesus is born; we are getting born. This world is like a  
 womb. We are even like a womb...

    the Mother that gives birth  
     to Christ of us,  
         in us, and  
         through us.

    We speak eternal seed into broken fertile hearts.  
 That all describes the Christian's life in this world, and it  
 all involves pain.

    Pain... it comes in waves—contractions. Six days  
 you shall labor, and one day you shall rest, over and over.  
 Then forever rest, forever life in His image, but for now  
 pain and tribulation.

    All your life... contractions of pain. But listen  
 close, Bride of Christ—Strange Woman—Mother Church,  
 the pains are birth pains, and that makes all the difference.

    Several years ago I pulled into the Conoco station at  
 the bottom of Highway 40. I went in to pay for the gas.  
 This young man was standing behind the counter. I glanced  
 around and saw pictures on the wall, greeting cards,  
 balloons. Some streamers were taped to the ceiling.

I had talked to him before so I said, “Hey man, what happened?”

He said, “Well, it’s kind of weird but a couple nights ago my wife started getting these really bad cramps in her gut, deep in her gut. So we rushed her to the hospital, scared to death—didn’t know if she’d live or die. The doctor rushed her into the emergency room. I waited, they examined her, then someone said, “SHE’S HAVING A BABY!”

Now it’s not clear to me how something like that just slips by you, but it did and it does.

So Jesus says, “Sweetheart, I know it hurts, but you’re having a baby” and that changes everything.

Even though the pain of labor would get even worse for this young couple, the good news that they were having a baby entirely changed the experience of that pain. It no longer meant impending death; it meant impending life. And she was transferred from Emergency to Maternity.

Even there in the Conoco station I could tell that the anguish was forgotten, and the sorrow had turned into joy. As this proud young daddy showed me pictures of his beautiful new baby and explained, “That’s why the streamers, that’s why the cards, and balloons, and happy birthday sign.” It was a party where they once expected a grave.

Well, it would’ve been nice if someone had told him before the tribulating began. “Hey dude, she’s having a baby.” And he could’ve told her, “Sweetie it’s a baby.” Would’ve been nice, ’cause you see, they didn’t know how to have a baby.

Jesus said to His bride (soon to be impregnated with His Spirit in order to bear fruit.), Jesus said to his bride, “In this world you will have tribulation, pain deep in your gut,

but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. Life is fixin' to be born and that changes everything.”

So, how do you have a baby?  
 Expecting some tribulation—  
 that is, confusion, mess, and pain.

If you say, “Why does it have to hurt so bad?” Well, God said to the woman after she ate from the tree, “In pain shall you bring forth children.”

When Susan was in the tribulation of labor and she'd cry, “Why does it hurt so bad?” I found that this answer did not seem to help... “You're a woman. You sinned. You ate from the tree.”

Didn't help.

Technically, that's right but technically, we're all the woman. Technically, Jesus is the groom, the last Adam, and we're His bride. And technically God seems to have set the whole thing up with deep purposes for our labor pains, our pains through which the Christ is born. “He subjected the world to futility in hope.”

Well, when my bride is suffering in travail the statement, “You're a sinner” doesn't seem to help. However, this statement does. I bend over and whisper in her ear, “Sweetheart, just think of it, your little girl is almost here. In just ‘a little while’ you'll be holding your baby in your arms.” That helps. That's hope. And that's how you have a baby.

Expecting pain, but  
 In hope... and that changes everything. “Take heart.”  
 “Good cheer.”  
 Hope gives everything new meaning.

Hope gives time new meaning. It makes the “little while”  
little.

Hope gives pain new meaning and tells you what’s  
important.

Hope defines us. If you want to know who a person is  
really, don’t ask them where they’ve been, but  
where they hope to go.

Well, Jesus is where we hope to go.  
He’s firstborn among many brethren.  
Jesus is the presence of our future.

And you know hope for the future  
even changes our experience of the past.  
It makes all things new.

Once that Conoco lady knew she was having a  
baby, hoped in a baby, all those pains that she had already  
experienced in the past took on a whole new meaning. So  
even her memories became a new experience.

Jesus says, “When a woman gives birth, she no  
longer remembers the anguish for joy that a child is born  
into the world.” Now, of course, she remembers it hurt, but  
she no longer experiences the memory as a death but a  
birth.

No longer a shame but a grace  
No longer a failure but a triumph  
No longer a manger but a baby crib  
because hope has been born into her  
poverty and pain  
No longer sorrow but joy

He said, “The sorrow turns into joy.” Then He said,  
“Be of good cheer. I’ve overcome the world.” That doesn’t

mean He just wins in the end. It means He wins in every second of creation.

He gives new meaning (logos) to it all.  
 He's the sovereign Lord of space and time.  
 He is the meaning spoken into chaos.

So surrender your chaos, your world,  
 and nothing is wasted.  
 Even the worst day becomes the very best day.

On this night in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus the Messiah is delivered up to crucifixion, damnation, and hell. It is the greatest evil ever perpetrated in this world, and yet on this night and on this Friday, God will reconcile to Himself all things, making peace by the blood of the cross. It is the greatest good ever born out of this world.

Death became birth.  
 Sorrow turned into joy.  
 Friday became Good Friday.  
 It became Christmas—the birth of an entire new creation.

When we come to the cross in faith, when we come to the communion table in faith, and ingest His body and blood, we ingest eternal seed and Christ is born in us. “Christ in us; the hope of glory,” writes Paul.

Hope in us *is* Christ in us.  
 Glorious new meaning in us—hope.

Now some of you are thrilled, and some of you are terrified—terrified of hope. Afraid you'll be put to shame by hope—afraid to hope... in case hope fails, in case He fails.

Perhaps you lost a baby, aborted a baby, murdered a baby, even sacrificed a baby. Well, surrender your baby to Jesus and believe me, Jesus has your baby. Even more, He's waiting for you, to raise your baby with you in a new world. In the new world, time will no longer be our master but our servant. And then you'll see He really is your Bridegroom.<sup>1</sup> Behold even now He's whispering in your ear, "Sweetheart, have hope. I make all things new." Your hope is not wasted.

Perhaps you say, "I want a baby, and I can't have a baby." Well, that's not true, Bride of Christ. If you think that, you must think "the fruit of the Spirit" is only a metaphor. You must think that "Christ in you" is just a nice thought. You do give birth to a baby, Mother Church. You give birth to the Messiah, and He is not just a metaphor. And so none of your hope is wasted. Hope will not fail—will not disappoint us.

So,

"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the Lord. "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities. Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will



forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband.”

And you give birth to His body, His life.  
The eternal seed will not return void...  
Son of God and Son of Man.

And so what are those pains you are experiencing? They are the birth pains of the Messiah. You are the mother of the living. Your name is Eve—Mother Church. And so, Lookout Mountain Community Church, yes, there’s confusion, mess, and pain, but the pain is birth pain.

Have hope. None of your hope is wasted. Christ is your hope. Christ in you—the hope of glory.

And so, how do you have a baby?

With some pain, but a whole lot of hope.

How do you have a baby?

A few years ago Philip Yancey told us that of all the pains ranked in scientist’s surveys, the pain of childbirth is rated the worst. Then Philip asked, “But where in a hospital are you most likely to find people laughing and smiling? In what wing do you find balloons, streamers, relatives, and gifts? Where is the party? In the maternity wing. Where you find the most pain and the most hope.”

Your entire life is the maternity wing.

How do you have a baby?

Well, Susan and I got better at it. She said, “Oh, I want another one,” and we had four. It was always

confusing, messy, and painful, but the pain spelled hope. The tribulation was cause for good cheer.

Our fourth baby, Coleman Dan Hiatt, was born on Susan's 34th birthday.

How do you have a baby? Like this...

[The Hiatt's home video of "When Coleman Turned Zero" is shown. Susan and Peter and all the kids are in Susan's hospital room. There are two birthday cakes, one for Susan's 34th birthday and one for Coleman's birth. There are streamers, balloons, cigars. Peter is filming the scene.]

Peter: "Anything you want to say now?"

Susan: "No. Coleman, I really want you to come out, and I really want to see you."

Peter: "Okay. Get out of there, get out of there. Get, get, get out of there. I'm gonna push him out."

[In the next scene, Coleman has been born.]

Peter: "Hi baby. Hi. Welcome to the outside."

Dan Hiatt: "Well you need some pain in life."

Peter: "Yeah, yeah, so I guess that's just to

commemorate the birth process.”

Dan Hiatt: “Yeah.”

Peter: [Peter pans the room with the camera.] “Yeah. Okay, we’re getting ready for the party. There’s Coleman’s cake. It says, ‘Happy Birthday, Coleman.’ That’s our hats. [Point to the next cake...] It says, ‘Happy Birthday and Give Birth Day, Mom’—34 years old. Cigars. We’re ready to go.”

Susan: “Coleman is 0.”

Dan: “The day Coleman turns 0, right?”

Susan: “He’s not even 1 day yet, is he? Just a few hours. Who are we gonna do first?”

Peter: “Cole first, because he was born early. Cole and Mommy. Okay, you ready? Here we go 2-3-4.”

All: “Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday dear Cole and Mom. Happy Birthday to you.”

Peter: “Okay now. Which, what are you gonna teach him?”

Jon: I’m gonna teach him how to play cars, ride bikes.”

Peter: “Yeah?”

Jon: “How to walk.”

Peter: “Becky, what are you gonna teach Coleman how to do?”

Becky: “I gonna teach him to play ponies.”

Peter: “You’re gonna teach him how to play ponies and what else you gonna teach him?”

Becky: “Teach him to ride...”

Peter: “You gonna teach him how to pick his nose?”

Becky: “Huh?”

Peter: “Oh, good. Anything else?”

Becky: “I’m gonna teach him to drink water.”

Peter: “Oh, that’s a good thing, to drink water, yeah.”

Becky: “And I gonna teach him to hold a balloon.”

And so on the night that He was betrayed, He said to His disciples, “I have earnestly desired to eat this supper

with you.” And He took bread and He broke it saying, “This is my body given to you. Take and eat. Do it in remembrance of me.” And in the same way after supper and having given thanks, He took the cup, and He said, “This is the cup of the New Covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me.”

[Peter puts a candle in the communion bread and leads everyone in singing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus and a verse of “O Little Town of Bethlehem.”]

Oh Holy Child of Bethlehem,  
 descend on us we pray.  
 Cast out our sin and enter in.  
 Be born in us today.

#### Benediction

If you came to the table in faith, don't be alarmed but you're having a baby (you're pregnant with eternal seed that will not return void). You're having a baby.

So expect some confusion, mess, and pain. But have hope. Always be of good cheer.

You're having the baby and blessed, most blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

**O** LORD, in distress they sought you;  
 they poured out a whispered prayer  
 when your discipline was upon them.  
 Like a pregnant woman  
 who writhes and cries out in her pangs  
 when she is near to giving birth,  
 so were we because of you, O LORD;  
 we were pregnant, we writhed,  
 but we have given birth to wind.  
 We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth,  
 and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen.  
 Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.  
 You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!  
 For your dew is a dew of light,  
 and the earth will give birth to the dead.  
 Come, my people, enter your chambers,  
 and shut your doors behind you;  
 hide yourselves for a little while  
 until the fury has passed by.

~ *Isaiah 26:16-20*

For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts.

~ *Haggai 2:6-7*

**I**n the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. . . . He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. . . . 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 again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone

who is born of the Spirit. . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice. . . . A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father?’” So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.”

~ *John 1:1-4, 1:11-13,  
3:5-8, 5:25-28, 16:16-18*

Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For,

“Yet a little while,  
and the coming one will come and will not delay;  
but my righteous one shall live by faith,  
and if he shrinks back,  
my soul has no pleasure in him.”

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

~ *Hebrews 10:35-39*

**J**esus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’? 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 giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. . . . I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

~ *John 16:19-22, 33*

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 these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all

nations for my name's sake. . . . So also, when you see all these things, you know that he [the Son of Man] is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

~ *Matthew 24:6-9, 24:33-34*

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? . . . And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

~ *Romans 8:18-24, 8:28-29*

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. . . . Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

~ *Colossians 1:15-18, 1:24-27*

"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" . . . Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

~ *Matthew 12:48b-49, 16:13*

My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. . . . 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 cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.”

~ Galatians 4:19-20, 4:26-27

And a great 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 pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 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 give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to 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 she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. . . . And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so 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 a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

~ Revelation 12:1-6, 12:13-17

**T**here 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 B. Craddock in *Journal for Preachers*

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 J. M. Nouwen

Birth pangs are felt in polished pulpits as once they were in a crude manger. Preaching the Word of God involves pain--for both preacher and hearers. What flows through one person's mouth into the heart of another, after all, is the Word of the wholly other God, and that's bound to create a disturbance along the way.

~ Donald W. McCullough,

*Trivialization of God: The Dangerous Illusion of Manageable Deity*

**H**aving purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for

“All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

~ 1 Peter 1:22-25

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;  
he has put him to grief;  
when his soul makes an offering for sin,  
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;  
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.  
Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities. . . .  
“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;  
break forth into singing and cry aloud,  
you who have not been in labor!  
For the children of the desolate one will be more  
than the children of her who is married,” says the LORD.  
“Enlarge the place of your tent,  
and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;  
do not hold back; lengthen your cords  
and strengthen your stakes.  
For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,  
and your offspring will possess the nations

and will people the desolate cities.  
 Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;  
 be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced;  
 for you will forget the shame of your youth,  
 and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.  
 For your Maker is your husband,  
 the LORD of hosts is his name;  
 and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,  
 the God of the whole earth he is called.  
 For the LORD has called you  
 like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit,  
 like a wife of youth when she is cast off,  
 says your God.  
 For a brief moment I deserted you,  
 but with great compassion I will gather you.  
 In overflowing anger for a moment  
 I hid my face from you,  
 but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,"  
 says the LORD, your Redeemer. . . .  
 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
 and do not return there but water the earth,  
 making it bring forth and sprout,  
 giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
 it shall not return to me empty,  
 but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
 and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

~ *Isaiah 53:10-11, 54:1-8, 55:10-11*

"I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." . . .  
 The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

~ *Genesis 3:15, 20 (RSV)*

. . . the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.  
 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

~ *Colossians 1:26-27*

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

~ *Romans 5:3-5 (RSV)*

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