

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Penrith

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ENCOURAGEMENT LETTER – 29JAN25

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How are you today? I am thankful for our country, Australia, for all God's blessings to it and for the freedom to proclaim Christ.

Remember this Sunday is a combined service and then talking about the Congregation Snapshot afterward. I look forward to seeing you there.

Today's encouragement is "Anticipation – The Return of Christ" before moving on to church matters.

ENCOURAGEMENT: Anticipation – The Return of Christ

Do you find yourself groaning as you struggle in this world? We groan when we find work difficult and burdensome. We groan when people do not treat us right. We groan when we are overwhelmed by trials and difficulties. We groan when we hear of horrible things happening in this world. In this world we are filled with groaning.

Paul in Romans 8 says we groan as we anticipate Christ's return:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

Romans 8:22-23

Our groaning at the brokenness of this world becomes, as Christians, an expression for our eager expectation for the return of Christ when our salvation will be complete. We will be with God in his home, the New Creation, as his adopted children in Christ. It is then that we no longer have broken bodies that run down, but our bodies will be redeemed in resurrection and we will have imperishable bodies that do not break down. Each of us lives in the hope of what is to come and our groaning for a better life accentuates our longing for Christ's return.

But what do we do with our groans – wordless articulations that can give expression to our deepest sorrows, anxieties and frustrations? We live in hope, but how do we deal with our groans as we wait for our hope to be realised?

So Paul writes:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Romans 8:26-27

Groans are an expression of weakness and inability to give expression to our heart's deepest aches and longings, but in the Spirit these groans are given to God as a verbalisation of our hurt and longing. The Spirit who lives within us, who searches out our hearts, who knows our inner most thoughts and feelings – he takes these things and intercedes through us in our groaning to offer our hearts up to God in prayer. We are to bring our longing hearts to God and offer them up to him in prayer as we wait for the day when Christ returns.

As we begin this year and anticipate what it holds, let us move into this year anticipating the return of Christ. Let us remember that this world is broken but the Saviour has come, and will come again. We wait for that day. In your longing for the day of the Lord, will you give voice to your longing in prayer, even if it is only in groans, tears and inarticulate noises? Will you set your heart on the hope to be fulfilled in Christ? As we labour for God's kingdom together, will you do so, anticipating the day when Jesus Christ will return?

FINAL COMMENTS

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

As always, love and prayers,
Steve