

July 19, 2026 — Sermon

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:12–25

Gospel Reading: Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

“Living with Hope”

When I accepted my appointment to Wisconsin, I imagined cool summers. After living in Atlanta for two years, I thought, “At least I will not have to deal with that kind of heat anymore.” I was wrong. This week, I started my car and looked at the dashboard. The temperature was in the triple digits. I thought, “This cannot be Wisconsin!”

When I returned from Korea, I brought plenty of winter clothes because everyone had warned me about Wisconsin winters. Now I am thinking that I should have bought a few more summer shirts too. Earlier this week, our District Superintendent, Rev. Peace Kim, called me to discuss some church business. While we were talking, he asked me, “Are you regretting moving to Wisconsin because of the heat?” Of course, I could not say yes. But for just a moment... I thought about it. I think everyone has felt the same way. It has been extremely hot. And we are not the only ones suffering from the heat. The whole creation is suffering. But here is some good news. I checked the climate averages, and August is usually a little cooler than July. So there is hope.

Last Friday, I went to the Barron County Fair. One of our church members participated in the dairy show, and I was very happy to see her receive a medal. At the fair, I saw how carefully people cared for their animals—feeding, brushing, grooming, and training them. Caring for a living creature does not happen overnight. It requires attention, patience, responsibility, and hope. Yes, creation itself is an expression of God’s hope, and it invites us to live with hope.

In Genesis 1, before human beings appear, God prepares a world full of light, water, land, plants, and living creatures. We enter a world already created, blessed, and loved by God. Creation is not merely a stage for human activity or a collection of resources for us to use. It is a community of life to which we belong. We are part of creation, not separate from it. We are not owners. We are stewards, people entrusted with caring for what belongs to God. Therefore, the brokenness of creation is not only an environmental problem. It is also a spiritual and relational problem. As Christians, we must recognize the ways we have failed to maintain faithful relationships with the land, the water, the animals, our neighbors, and the other creatures with whom we share this world.

Paul tells us in Romans that this beautiful creation is groaning. We have seen reminders of that recently. Smoke from wildfires in Canada has traveled far beyond the places where the fires began. What happens far away can reach our homes because the forests, the air, the animals, and our bodies all belong to one creation.

When I was in high school, one of my biology teachers said, "I like Christianity, but I do not want to become a Christian because I do not want to be called a sinner." I would like to say that sin and crime are not the same thing. To confess that we are sinners does not necessarily mean that we have committed a terrible crime, or even gotten a speeding ticket. It means that we have the courage to look honestly at ourselves and at the brokenness of the world. It means admitting, "I cannot pretend that the suffering and brokenness of this world have nothing to do with me." It also means saying, "I will not ignore the pain of the world." In that sense, becoming a Christian requires courage. Faith asks us to see connections that we might otherwise avoid.

Think about a polar bear standing on melting ice. We may ask, "What does a polar bear have to do with us?" At first, it may seem that it has nothing to do with us. But when we think about our identity as people who believe in Jesus Christ, the question becomes different. The question of connection also helps us understand why Jesus matters to us. What does Jesus have to do with us? Why do his suffering and death matter to us? They matter because, in Christ, God chose to become connected with us. Jesus did not remain distant from human suffering. He entered our lives. He shared our pain. He faced death itself. And when we become connected with Christ, his story also becomes our story. His death was not the end. Jesus rose again. Because Christ rose, we believe that suffering and death do not have the final word. We can look beyond our present pain and imagine a future filled with hope.

We are connected. But our connection is not only a reason for guilt or fear. It is also a reason for hope. Just as pain can pass from one life to another, healing can too. We can care together. We can change together. We can protect what is vulnerable. We can stand beside those who suffer. And we can imagine a brighter future together. In Christ, this connection becomes even deeper. We are not isolated individuals. We are one body. We see the pain of the world because we are connected to it. And together, we dream of the hope God is bringing into the world. This is why we are here.

Paul compares creation's groaning to labor pains. The pain of childbirth is real. But a mother bears the pain because she knows that it will bring great joy and new life. Creation is groaning, but God is bringing forth new life. So we can wait for that moment while keeping hope.

Then Jesus tells us another parable. A farmer plants good seed, but weeds appear among the wheat. The servants ask, "Should we pull them up?" But the farmer answers, "No. Let both grow together until the harvest."

We often focus on the weeds because they seem to threaten the wheat and make its growth more difficult. But the weeds are not the only things growing. The wheat is growing too. The enemy entered the field, but the enemy did not become the owner of the field. The field still belongs to the farmer. And the farmer has not abandoned it.

I have never farmed, so the farmers among us may correct me if I'm wrong. I think this is what faithful farmers do. They do not walk away from a field because growth becomes difficult. They watch over the field with love and attention. They care for what is growing and wait for the right moment because they want the best possible harvest. A good farmer's waiting is not neglect. It is patient care filled with hope.

The farmer's greatest concern is not simply destroying the weeds. The farmer's desire is to preserve the wheat and bring it safely to the harvest. Living with hope does not mean pretending that everything is fine. Hope does not deny the smoke in the air, the groaning of creation, or the weeds in the field. Hope means trusting that God is still caring for the field. Hope means believing that pain can become the labor through which new life is born. Hope means knowing that, because we are connected in Christ, none of us has to grow alone.

So let us care for one another. Let us care for God's creation. Let us keep growing in faith, love, and grace. And let us live with hope. Amen.

Let us pray. God of creation, thank you for giving us this beautiful world. We confess that we sometimes forget our responsibility to care for what you have made. Be with us, and remind us that we are called to care for this world. Even when hope is difficult to see, give us the patience and courage to discover it and to share it in the ways you desire. Through Jesus Christ, who connects us to you and to one another, we pray. Amen.