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Hope in the Spirit, Hope for the Children of God

In 1946 on a clear, crisp November morning, Irving Langmuir, a chemist at General Electric, stood in the control tower of the Schenectady NY airport intently and fiercely studying the clouds some 50 miles away as he followed a small single propeller plane through the lenses of his binoculars. The plane had taken almost an hour to make the 13,000 foot ascent up above the clouds, carrying Langmuir's assistant Vincent Schaeffer and six pounds of crushed dry ice. As Schaeffer found himself atop the clouds he opened the plane's window and dumped the dry ice down below. No sooner did Langmuir witness those same clouds begin to shift and swirl above him, as they released streams of tiny frozen ice crystals down onto the earth below. Grabbing the phone Langmuir dialed a journalist at GE reporting how they'd made history. "Mankind" Langmuir exclaimed, "had finally learned to control the weather." Of course, we hadn't learned to control the weather, we had only begun to tinker with it. But, Langmuir didn't care; he was elated with the idea of what this might mean for his research at G.E. and more so for humanity as we continued to advance in our understanding of and impact on the world around us.

As we hear Paul's letter to the Romans this morning it is almost as if he is writing not simply to the Romans then and there, struggling as Christian's within the confines of a powerful empire, but to us here and now as the human race struggling within the confines of a sometimes hostile planet. As we read his words concerning creation, waiting "with eager longing... [as it is] subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it." We might wonder, is that us, who subjected creation to our own futile and sometimes unintentionally destructive ways? As Paul goes on "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains...; and not only... creation, but we ourselves," waiting for relief from all that plagues us and for salvation from all we fear. While I can not speak to the "bondage of decay" that creation was being subjected to over 2,000 years ago. I can certainly see it today as I turn on the news to hear of record high temperatures lasting for weeks on end. Or as I touch base with friends living in places like Louisiana and Texas to hear their own groans from beneath the oppression of a heat dome. Or even as I hear of the cries for help coming from our indigenous neighbors in Alaska as they experience the destruction of their land to the melting permafrost. Or in Africa as they lose their way of life to drought depleted deserts. And yet, Paul tells us, that same creation that groans in labor pains waits "in hope that [it] will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

Not long after Langmuir's experiments here in the US, over 5,000 miles away in Russia, and a few years later during the cold war, two scientists and writers, Nikolai Roussin, a climatologist, and Leah Flitt, a journalist with good experience in the field of popularization of science, sought to solve the "problem" of permafrost, that made much of Siberia uninhabitable. In their book, Man Versus Climate, Roussin and Flitt explored the early science of Geoengineering (technologies that manipulate the environment and impact the climate). Flitt and Roussin saw geoengineering as the answer to Russia's problem of 13 million square miles of frozen land. Discussing, in their book, ideas such as the use of ash or peat scattered over the tundra and allowing the sun's rays to absorb into and eventually melt the ice away. Or blasting potassium into the atmosphere creating rings around the planet like Saturn, and directing more of the Sun's rays towards the Northern hemisphere. But, the idea that received the most traction, even from our

own presidential candidate at the time John F. Kennedy, was that of a fifty five mile dam across the Bering Strait, from Siberia to Alaska. Which would change the direction of the warming ocean currents, the central heating pipelines of our planet, moving them up North. And, in turn, melting the ice that surrounds the Arctic, and warming the millions of unlivable miles in Siberia within a few years. Flitt and Roussin were overcome with excitement and optimism at the impact these climate changes could have for our world. And while we would assume that they didn't have a clue of the impact and danger global warming could actually have on our world, we would be wrong. Even in their book, published over half a century ago, the two referenced the greenhouse effect (only a theory at the time). Allowing them to understand that should we intervene with this earth's climate we would see an overall temperature rise around the globe, they predicted, of nearly ten degrees fahrenheit in less than fifty years. Thankfully, that is not the case, even with our own impact on the climate today.

For many of us the idea and effects of climate change are terrifying. Extreme weather, melting ice caps, and rising sea levels are now beginning to change the way we live and move and have our being, some more than others. Forcing our neighbors on the coast to consider the reality of losing their homes and livelihoods to rising sea levels. Pushing farmers and ranchers to contend with changing and sometimes extreme weather patterns affecting their crops and livestock, the very food we depend upon for survival. And, requiring infrastructures, like the power grids to find new and more efficient ways to ensure that we can sustain in sometimes very inhospitable climates. With all this in mind our world today can feel scary, it can feel hopeless. And yet, as we hear from Paul today it is "in hope [that] we are saved." We are now in a time that requires hope, hope in a future unseen, and a solution unknown. Hope in humanity to work together, hope in creation to sustain the life that it continues to produce, hope in the Spirit of God to inspire and guide us towards something like salvation, both here and now and then and there. As Paul reminded us today, "all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God."

The story of Irving Langmuir and Vincent Schaffer reminds me of the fact that we are called as children of God to play, to use our God given intellect and our spirit of curiosity to find new ways to support the creation God has given us to care for. And too, the story of Nikolai Roussin and Leah Flitt reminds me that we need the wisdom of our communities to keep our dreams from possibly turning into nightmares. What if we, as Paul suggests, acted more like children, using our creativity, our wonderment, our sheer determination to discover what this world has to offer, taking it all in with joy and enthusiasm and hope. Might we then be able to find a solution, to work together, to discover that we are capable of more than we had ever imagined? Or what if we like children trusted in those with the knowledge and tools to both discover and teach us how to better care for our earth? Or even what if we like children remembered that it is in sharing what we have that we can have even more than we ever could on our own, joining together our resources, our knowledge, our ability to support one another and this creation God has given us to care for? As a mother of three young children today I hold on to hope, because it is all I have to keep me from spiraling into a place of fear and frustration at the space we find ourselves in today. And, as a child of God I hold onto hope because it pushes me to live in Spirit. The Spirit of our loving, liberating, and life giving God. I pray we can continue to move towards hope, to live into Spirit, and to work towards salvation not only then and there, but here and now.