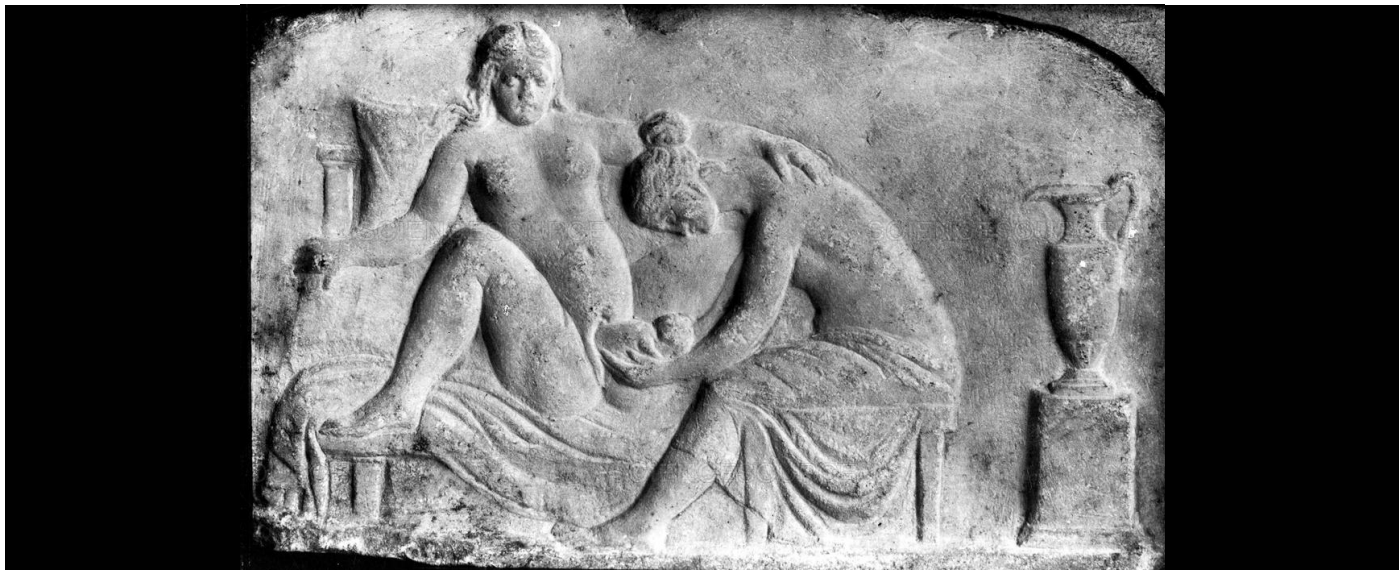


3. Groaning



The head and shoulders of the baby are free but there is still work to be done and a furious focus fills the woman's face. It is costly, this bringing to birth. Her right hand desperately grips the side of her bed and the fingers of her left hand dig hard into the midwife's back. The scene is so vivid that the sounds of her labour echo down the centuries.

This ancient Roman bas-relief had already been sculpted when St Paul wrote to the persecuted church in Rome. Perhaps he or some of those who read his letter had even seen it. Either way, his description of "*the whole creation groaning in labour pains*" (Romans 8. 22) would certainly have resonated powerfully. Their world - like ours - was in crisis. Persecution generated fear and suffering, just as climate change and systemic injustice do. Just as pandemic does. Then, as now, it could be difficult to know how to pray. Inarticulate groaning in tune with the world's groaning was all Paul himself could sometimes manage.

But it is no accident that Paul specifies the groaning of *labour* pain for such pain ushers in wonderful newness. He was confident that, out of the sufferings of his own age, the costly labour of God-in-Christ would bring something glorious to birth.

Today...

...when we groan with despair, remind us, O God,
that in Christ you make all things new.

Amen