

The Second Sunday in Advent – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
Romans 15:4-13: “We Glorify God for His Gift of Hope.”  
December 9/10, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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O Almighty God, who knitted together Your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Your Son, grant us Your Holy Spirit, we humbly ask, that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we may abound in hope, being filled with all joy and peace in believing; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 51)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the fifteenth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. / Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.” And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.” And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol Him.” And again Isaiah says, “The Root of Jesse will come, even He who arises to rule the Gentiles; in Him will the Gentiles hope.” / May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

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In Christ Jesus, who has brought sinners all over the world into His holy body by cleansing them with His blood (Eph. 2:13), dear fellow redeemed:

In the Holy Gospel for today, Jesus describes what will happen in the world and in the universe before His return on the last day (Luke 21:25-36). Signs will be seen “*in sun and moon and stars.*” Nations will be distressed because of “*the roaring of the sea and the waves,*” referring to things like hurricanes, tidal waves, and floods. People will faint with fear and foreboding when they see what is happening.

And then Jesus will return in His glory. Most people will not be ready. Their focus was on other things. Their hope was anchored in the world. That day will come upon them “*suddenly like a trap.*” They will not escape His judgment. They will be condemned to eternal punishment in hell. You might wonder if you will avoid this fate. You might question if you are faithful enough to be gathered with God's people in heaven.

Today's reading from the Epistle to the Romans addresses these concerns. The apostle Paul writes by inspiration that we have something more sure to go by than our thoughts, our experiences, or even a feeling in our gut about where we stand with God. We have the Holy Scriptures. Specifically Paul is talking about the Old Testament, the record of events from the creation of the world to some four hundred years before the birth of Christ.

The Old Testament is far more than a collection of historical accounts, laws, and psalms, which are only useful for historians, lawyers, or musicians who like those sorts of things. Paul writes that *"whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction."* As we study the Scriptures, we learn endurance and find encouragement, because we see the trials that God brought His people through and the many examples of His goodness and blessings.

So through the Scriptures we also learn to have hope. We are not the first to have troubles. We are not the first to have worries and doubts. We are not the first to fall short of the glory of God in our sin. We are part of a long line of sinner-saints stretching back through time, back through the Reformation, back through the early Church, back through the apostles, back through the prophets, back through the patriarchs. This is a continuous, unbroken line, because our merciful God has preserved His Church through all of history.

The way He has preserved His Church is through His Scriptures. Both God and His Word are described as giving the same thing. The *"God of endurance and encouragement"* gives this endurance and encouragement through His Scriptures. The *"God of hope"* gives hope through His Scriptures. Everything good that God wants to give us, every blessing He has planned for us, comes to us through His Holy Word.

Paul emphasized this point in his epistle to the Christians in Rome by pointing them to God's promise that salvation was not for the Israelites only but for all people. Those who were not part of God's chosen people Israel were called the Gentiles. They belonged to the pagan nations around Israel who did not glorify God or listen to His Word. The Gentiles had no reason to hope for God's mercy based on who they were or what they did or what they could offer to Him. They deserved His wrath for their many sins.

And yet God planned salvation for them. Paul referenced the Old Testament prophecies recorded by Moses in the 1400s B. C., by David around the year 1000 B. C., and by Isaiah in the 700s B. C. All those prophecies show that Gentiles would join the Israelites in praising the Lord. The Israelites who had the Scriptures must have had a hard time imagining this. *"The wicked Gentiles whom we are supposed to stay away from will join us in glorifying the true God? How can this be?"*

That question is answered by Isaiah's prophecy: *"The Root of Jesse will come, even He who arises to rule the Gentiles; in Him will the Gentiles hope"* (Isa. 11:10). The Gentiles would hope in the *"Root of Jesse."* Jesse was the father of King David. Long after the glory had departed from that family, after the last descendant of David sat on the crumbling throne of Jerusalem, a greater King would rise up. Isaiah prophesied that *"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit"* (11:1).

That King was Jesus, a blood descendant of David through His mother Mary (Luk. 3:23ff.), and a legal descendant of David through His guardian Joseph (Mat. 1:1ff.). Jesus' family tree contained all manner of sinners—liars, murderers, adulterers, and even some Gentiles. This human line shows what kind of people He came to save—sinful people, guilty of all sorts of wrongdoing against God.

God in His love does not make a distinction between Jew and Gentile anymore. He does not see any one group of people as better than another, and neither should we. Men are not better than women, or women than men. Republicans are not better than Democrats, or Democrats than Republicans. Americans are not better than foreigners, or foreigners than Americans. Even Christians are not better than non-Christians in the sense of being less guilty of sin.

Romans 3 says, *"For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (vv. 22-23). That should give us a great sympathy toward the people around us. They struggle with sin just like we do. They probably regret a lot of things just like we do. And Jesus died for their sins just as certainly as He died for ours. Who can be below me, unworthy of my love, if Jesus, who was perfect in every way, who never did any wrong toward anyone—if He humbled Himself to be nailed to a cross and die for all my sins?

That is our hope, a hope that is clearly spelled out for us in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Jesus died for me. Jesus died for you. Jesus died for every sinner in human history. It is His sacrifice that brings together people of various nationalities, languages, and customs into one holy body, into His body the Church.

As members of one body, God wants us to glorify Him with one voice. Some Christians take this to mean that we need to set aside our doctrinal differences, and we need to compromise the Bible's teaching for the sake of outward unity among Christians. This is the reason why many churches in our area will hold joint worship services. They believe and teach many different things in their own buildings, but they still think something can be gained by an outward show of unity. This is a false unity that we want nothing to do with.

Unity in the church is never to be looked for outside of the Scriptures, but in and through the Scriptures. God's Word creates the only unity worth having, as the Holy Spirit brings us to Christ and Christ to us. Unity in the church is God's work, not ours. Paul writes, *"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."* We see here that God grants harmony, and that this harmony will be built on Christ Jesus and grow through Him if it is true harmony.

So we don't create this unity, but we certainly can destroy it. We destroy unity in the church when we put anything else before God's Holy Word. Maybe it is our pride—we want things a certain way, and we insist that everything happen just the way we want it, or else there is going to be a big fight. Or maybe it is our passions—instead of resisting our sinful desires, we give in to them and give no thought to how our actions affect and hurt the whole body of Christ. Or maybe it is our prejudice—we think that we could never work with people who have this background, who look like this, or talk like that.

When we give in to our pride, our passions, our prejudice, or any other sins, we simultaneously give up all hope. Trusting in our own way always leads to hopelessness. But God in His mercy calls us out of our hopelessness and away from our sin. He leads us to repentance, to the humble acknowledgement that we have done wrong, and to the conviction that we don't want to keep doing wrong.

Then the Holy Spirit through the Holy Word points us to Jesus. "That Root of Jesse came forth for you," He says. "He came to be your King and bring you into His kingdom. He came to pay for all your sins and cover you in His holiness. You are not destined for the Father's wrath and punishment. You have salvation by faith in His Son."

That is the hope given to you and declared to you in both the Old and the New Testaments. It is the hope that gives "*endurance and encouragement*" as the world around us devolves into selfishness, hatred, and deceit. **We Glorify God for His Gift of Hope.** The hope we have in Jesus gives us joy in trying and troubling times, and it gives us peace in our distresses.

Jesus comes through His Holy Word to bring us this joy and peace and to strengthen our confidence that He will return on the last day. He will save us from the judgment that awaits those who reject Him. He will bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom. For this, we Gentiles praise and thank Him and extol His holy name, just as the Scriptures said we would.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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