

Second Sunday in Advent: December 4, 2022

Romans 15:4-13

“We Have Real Hope”

Indeed, whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that, through patient endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we would have hope. And may God, the source of patient endurance and encouragement, grant that you agree with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that with one mind, in one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For this reason, accept one another as Christ also accepted you to the glory of God. For I am saying that Christ became a servant of those who are circumcised for the sake of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs. He also did this so that the Gentiles would glorify God for his mercy, as it is written:

For this reason I will praise you among the Gentiles,
and I will sing to your name.

And again it says:

Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.

And again:

Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples give him praise.

And again Isaiah says:

There will be a Root of Jesse,
and he is the one who will rise up to rule the Gentiles;
on him the Gentiles will place their hope.

Now may the God of hope fill you with complete joy and peace as you continue to believe, so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What do you hope for?

There is one kind of hope that’s really a wish. As Christmas approaches, many hope to receive certain gifts. They may or may not get them. This is “hope” the way we normally think of it: optimism. We hope like Charlie Brown, that this time Lucy will keep the football in place and we’ll give it a mighty kick.

But how does a Christian hope? The Holy Spirit teaches us through St. Paul’s letter to the Romans: Christian hope is certain because it grounds itself in God’s words and works. Paul writes: **Christ became a servant to confirm...the promises God made.** That’s the basis for real hope, certain Christian hope: what God promised and accomplished in Christ Jesus.

Sometimes, though, Christians do succumb to that flimsier hope, the optimism that insists, “Everything is going to be okay.” But the trials of life quickly dash that hope. As we wait for Jesus to come, we can become tired and discouraged. Life fills with unexpected troubles, things we never imagined ten or twenty years ago would ever trouble us. Is this what we hoped for? We never hope for a car accident, but they

happen anyway. We do not hope for squabbles with family members, but the fights come. And then what happens to hope?

Beware of hope that just wishes for the best. Because when worse than best comes, that hope doesn't just disappoint; it devastates. Christian hope is not just wanting everything to turn out okay. It is complete confidence and conviction. It is hope we cannot find in ourselves or our world, because it comes only from what God says and does. Paul writes: **Indeed, whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that, through patient endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we would have hope.**

The Holy Spirit did not move the writers of the Bible to record just a list of do's and don'ts, a holy book of etiquette. Of God's law is there to show our sin. But Scripture is the record of God's promises and deeds, spoken and done for us. It teaches us that he is the one in whom to trust and put our hope.

Indeed, whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that, through patient endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we would have hope. In order to draw that hope from God's Word, God invites us to consider the many saints who went before us. Scripture teaches us through the examples of many believers that troubles will come, so don't hope that everything will be fine. Instead, trust that God's promises remain sure, even when life is rough. That's true hope.

Think of Job, who was so patient in his suffering, even though he lost his children, possessions, and health. Remember Joseph, betrayed by his brothers, sent to prison, accused unjustly by his master's wife. Think of David, as his father-in-law Saul and later his own son Absalom plotted to kill him. If any of these men had based their hope on the things they could see around them turning out okay, they would have all quickly lost their hope.

But they based their hope on something else: God's promise to bless them, save them, and work all things for their good. So they remained patient even while their surroundings were crumbling, and waited for God in sure, divine hope. Job, Joseph, David, and many other heroes were more than just brave and stoic. They had hope in God's promise to deliver them in his time, in his way.

So we do more than hope everything will be okay. Because troubles will come. And every trouble in this world has one thing in common, whether it's issues of money, family, or health. They all come from one foundational problem: our sinfulness, which mars every relationship, sickens and destroys the body, and warps our minds away from God.

But God has spoken. Long ago he made a promise that sin would be undone by a Savior. The Lord spoke. And then he worked. He acted. He fulfilled his promise in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of his own Son.

Christ became a servant...to confirm the promises. Jesus gives us true hope. He is total confidence that our sins are forgiven. He is confidence that the same God who promised and delivered our salvation will also deliver on his promise to use even the worst for our best in the end. He is real hope that when things are not turning out okay, they are more than okay because God is controlling all things and working them into his ultimate plan. Jesus is our confidence that God will rescue us from a world where things are so often not okay, and deliver us to perfection. This is true hope: not some nebulous wish that everything will turn out fine, but knowing we they will turn out perfect because of what God said and did in his Son.

This true hope, based on God's words and works, must be patient. We must wait and look past the things that are not okay now and wait for God's perfect deliverance. But we are so impatient by nature. Recently I went to the optometrist and learned I needed glasses. After being fitted and choosing these delightful frames, the receptionist told me, "We will text you when your new glasses arrive. It will be about two weeks." Fifteen days later I sent a nasty text to them that said in part, "I could have learned how to make my own glasses in less time than it takes you to make them." And that was the polite part of the message. Yes, it is an extreme example from a bad day. But patience is hard, and it's fading faster and faster from our world.

Those who place certain hope in God's Word must be patient. This is why we need Advent. This season cultivates discipline and waiting, not just for Christmas but for the Lord to fulfill all his promises. Jesus came to save when it was the right time for God. It took thousands of years, but he came as the Lord promised. God delivers in his own time, and only calls us to be patient as we hope.

Hope centered on God – his saving words and works – grows patience. Because God is the one making the promises, you know it will happen when his time is right. It's harder to patient when the outcome is uncertain. It's easier when you are totally confident that the one who's promised to deliver will deliver.

Our hope is in God's deliverance, so we wait patiently. We remember that he delivered on his promise to save us from our sins. He did it on his own timetable, but he did it. His promise to deliver us from all trouble is divine. We know it will happen, in his time. So we wait patiently. He has forgiven all our sins, and will bring us to everlasting joy.

When Christians with sure hope wait patiently for the Lord to save, what will their lives look like? **And may God, the source of patient endurance and encouragement, grant that you agree with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that with one mind, in one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Our hope produces unified worship. We glorify God with a single mind and voice for the simple reason that he gives us hope. He gives us all hope, and he gives us all the same hope. That unifies us. That brings us together. And it moves us to lift up praise together to our God in whom we hope.

You see, if God tells me as an individual that I have hope that cannot fail, hope based on what he says and does to save me, then I will lift up my individual voice. If he tells all you the same thing at the same time, then we come together, hope together, praise together.

The patience we have with God to fulfill our hope and deliver us will also show in how we treat each other. We will be patient and harmonious with each other, and also with those in the world (even those who take three weeks to produce one pair of glasses). While the world rushes around us in the weeks to come, we will be different. We will be patient with each other and all people, as we are patient with God to satisfy our hope.

Our certain hope shows itself when we worship God together with one voice. And the patience we show as we hope for God to save us spills over into the way we treat others.

Now we hear St. Paul's closing blessing to the Romans, and we ask God for the same blessing. God, fill us with hope. Give us hope that cannot disappoint because it rests on what you say and do. Show us your word. Show us your saving work, so we overflow with certain hope that you have saved us from our sin, and in the end will save us from all trouble. **Now may the God of hope fill you with complete joy and peace as you continue to believe, so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.** Amen.