

Second Sunday of Advent

December 8, 2019

Romans 15:4-13:

“Living in Hope”

- I. Calls for Endurance.
- II. Brings Us Together as Family.
- III. Hope that Gives What This World Doesn't Give.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

You might recall the story about the man who was convinced he was dead. It reads as follows:

A psychiatrist had the man read an anatomy book and watch films to show him that dead men do not bleed. Then he took him to a room full of cadavers and he saw for himself that dead men don't bleed. "All right," he said, "I'm convinced. Dead men don't bleed." Then the doctor took a pin and poked the man, and a tiny drop of blood appeared. "Well, what do you know," the man exclaimed, "dead men do bleed after all."

Sometimes it gets that way, doesn't it? No matter how you look at things they don't look good. And no matter what's presented to you, or how it's presented, it still doesn't look good. I was thinking of Asaph's words regarding the prosperity of the wicked: "When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me..." (Ps. 73:16) Sometimes it gets that way, doesn't it? Living can become very oppressive. This second Sunday of Advent we're going to consider . . .

LIVING IN HOPE

I. Calls for Endurance.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope. (vv. 4,5)

So, the New Testament Apostle Paul impresses upon us that the Old Testament was written for our instruction. Are you familiar with the Old Testament? Have you ever heard someone say or have you read that it's "old" and doesn't apply that much to the moment? Are you familiar with the incredible trials and tribulations God's people of the Old Testament had to endure? Are you familiar with the fact that God didn't stop bad things from happening, but got His people through them and, by them, taught them to walk by faith and to endure? *Endure*. That's almost a nasty word to much of this culture. People don't want to endure. They just want. They want others to endure for them.

It was at one of our Wednesday evening services in August when I addressed the following from the Book of Philippians: "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining toward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (3:13) We have a goal, a prize. It's "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." It isn't here, this world. It's Heaven. And to get there the focus of life must shift - **must shift** from this world to Heaven. And guess what? That demands a strain as in "straining toward what lies ahead." It involves a press as in "I press on toward the goal." It involves forgetting as in "forgetting what lies behind."

The writer of Hebrews says, "let us run with endurance the race set before us." (12:1) A hard run - race. Endurance. The Apostle Paul writes "seek the things that are above...Set your minds on things that are above." (Col. 3:1,2) Seek. Set. Effort. Strain. Press. Run. Race. Endure. We must each ask ourselves: "What will I do with these words of Jesus?":

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:24-26a)

If our hope is focused on this world then we might as well spend our free time visiting cemeteries. That's where such hope takes us. As God's people, we take an active interest in the needs, safety and comfort of others; but in everything the focus is on God's eternal love in Christ; this Word: "...through

endurance and through the encouragement of Scripture (we have to study!) we might have hope." - forgiveness of every sin and everlasting life through Christ. And that brings us to the following . . .

II. Brings Us Together as Family.

The Holy Spirit had the writer of the Book of Hebrews write: "...let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (that is, Judgement Day)." (Heb. 10:24,25) Did you catch that: "stir up one another...meet together...encouraging one another..."? I want to connect that Scripture with these words from our text:

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. (vv. 5-7)

Our growth in the Word and the call to endure is something we pursue not just individually, but as members of God's household - family. Please forgive me for being terribly redundant but connect these statements from the Book of Hebrews - "stir up one another...meet together...encourage one another" - connect those statements with these from our text - "live in such harmony with one another...that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...welcome one another." This is family.

This Sunday brings us almost to the half way mark of the Advent Season. We gather here aware of the fact that what the Advent/Christmas Season once meant to much of this culture has passed. We must stand together as God's family in Christ. It is as God said to Ahaz, "If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all." (Is. 6:9b) If we are firm in faith and if we stand together to "stir up one another," to "encourage one another," to "live in harmony with one another" to "welcome one another" and "with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", we do so as God's family on earth. And that is powerful witness to this world! It is strength and comfort for us.

III. Hope that Gives What This World Doesn't Give.

Through Paul, the Holy Spirit then encourages us: "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." (v. 7) Look at us! God welcomed and took to Himself poor, miserable sinners. He loved and loves us in spite of our turmoil, upheavals, and on-going struggles with sin. Our text closes with these words:

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. (v. 13)

"The God of hope." The Scriptures teach, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) The Scriptures teach, "even when we were dead in our trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved..." (Eph. 2:5) How many times have we discussed this over the years. Though we came into this world spiritually dead, God made us alive in Christ. As Scriptures teach, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8,9) Dead yet made alive.

Everyone here knows, at least should know, the account of the death of Lazarus. Everyone who knows the account remembers the upset of Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha. There was that one point when we're told, "...many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother." (Jn. 11:19) It's what we do for each other when a loved one leaves this world. It was Martha

who said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (Jn. 11:21) Maybe that's what most of us feel when a loved one is called out of this world. "Lord, you could have done something to hold this moment back for just a while longer." But Martha believed what we believe, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." (Jn. 11:24)

And then we remember those words of Jesus to Martha; to us: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (Jn. 11:25,26a) Without Christ the hope of this world ends with the last breath. But we knew that, didn't we? Christ's entrance into this world and our lives changed everything.

It hurts when brothers and sisters who were family or friends in Christ are called into eternity, but their victory is our comfort and joy, even amidst the tears. It is as Peter wrote, "...he (the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ) has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (1 Pet. 1:3)

Our lives move beyond the grave into the everlasting Presence of Living God! In Christ, we are Living In Hope! And, by the way, we are family and we share that hope. God give us strength to endure.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott