

Sermon

December 9, 2007

(8:00 and 9:30 only)

Hope

Romans 15:4-13

This is the second Sunday in Advent.

There are a number of different themes
that are associated with the 4 Sundays in Advent,
but we use one the most—
--at least here at Good Shepherd.

One the Advent wreath,
we have those four words—
--peace
--hope
--joy
--love.

So, today we think about HOPE.

And the Bible passage
that guides us this morning
is our reading from Romans.
Particularly the first sentence
and the last sentence.
(The words in the middle are good, too.
But they don't relate as much to hope.)

Would you read the first sentence with me:

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

And the last sentence:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, as I've been thinking about hope this week,
I've realized we use the word in a number of different ways.

One way we use the word hope
is in situations where we have no influence,
and not a lot of confidence either.

I hope the Rams will win this afternoon.
I hope Brock Berlin has a great game
and they win the game.

Do I have any impact on whether the Rams will win this afternoon?
No, not really.
And even if I went to the game and cheered,
my impact would be really minimal.

Do I have confidence that the Rams will win today?
Can't say that I do.
I hope they will win.
And when we use the word that way,
it's a lot like a wish.
How far-fetched a wish?
We'll see.

Another way we use the word hope
is in situations where we have influence.

I might say:

I hope I get a pony for Christmas.
If I really hope for that,
I can have influence.
I can ask for a pony.
I can hint that I want a pony.
I can beg for a pony.
All of that still depends on some pony-giver.
I can also buy myself a pony.
I have influence.

I suppose the question is,
"Do I really want a pony?"
If I chose to ride it,
it might not be so good for the pony.

Or from a perspective of faith,
I might ask,
“Will following Christ
lead me to get a pony?”
At that point,
it’s a question of stewardship.
And the fact is,
I really don’t want or need a pony.

There are things I want.
And a much shorter list of things I need.
And if I hope for those things,
I can have some impact on whether or not I get them.

But the way this passage in Romans uses the word hope,
it’s a situation where we don’t have much, if any influence,
but we have great confidence in the giver.

Let’s look at those two verses again,
in reverse order:

Verse 13:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Who is the actor here?
Who fills you with hope?
God.
You abound in hope by the power of the—Holy Spirit.

Not by your power.
The only thing it mentions you doing is believing.
The action is God’s

I read this phrase somewhere:

An empty bucket can't fill itself.

And I like that.

Because so often
what I try to do is fill myself,
instead of trusting in the one who has the power.
And who is filling you and me with hope.
God fills you with hope
through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And verse 4:

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

What is Paul talking about here?

It seems to me that he's saying
that the Bible is given to us
so that we can have confidence in the giver of hope.

The Bible is filled with stories of people of faith
as God cares for them,
and comforts them,
and supports them.

And as we here how God has been faithful through the years,
we have hope—

--confident hope that God's Word is true,
--that God's love is for you and for me.

We have hope
in one who will not disappoint us.

We talked about this passage
at our Monday night Bible Study.
And someone made reference to a section of Romans
10 chapters earlier.

Listen to these words from Romans 5:

**...suffering produces endurance,
and endurance produces character,
and character produces hope,
and hope does not disappoint us—
(WHY?—)
--because God's love has been poured
into our hearts through the Holy Spirit
that has been given to us.**

It's not up to us.
It's up to God.
And through the words of the Bible,
and through the events of our lives,
we realize that we can trust that our hope in God
will not disappoint us.

And then, in our Monday Bible Study,
we told stories of how,
in the darkest of hours,
even at the end of life,
we remember those words of Scripture—
--and have hope.

I still remember visiting
with one woman,
death not far away,
Alzheimers,
didn't even talk at this stage.

But when I said Psalm 23,
then the light of hope began to shine.

**The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.**

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil,
for thy rod and thy staff,
they comfort me.**

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

And this woman,
who didn't usually say a word
when we visited,
said after me:
"Forever."

Forever.
That's the kind of hope I long for.
That's not dependent on me.
But is dependent on one I can trust completely.
And that one is God.
The God who comes to us this Advent season
through Jesus,
Immanuel,
God with us.

Now,
we have been given a wonderful gift of hope.
What are we going to do with it?
It seems to me that the temptation
is to just rest in that hope—
--to take the gift and hang on to it.
It's a wonderful gift.

But I think God's vision
is much bigger
and much better.

I think God's vision

is for us to continue to share the gift of hope.

I think sometimes God works through you and me to give hope.

When we are down,

we need the community of faith to build us up,
to give us hope.

And when others are down,

we need to be the community of faith for them,
to build them up in hope.

It's wonderful to receive the gift of hope.

And it's wonderful to share the gift of hope.

As God gives,

God also creates us to share.

What might that look like for you
in the week to come?

How will you celebrate hope?

And how will you share hope?

Yesterday

was the funeral for Russ Lehr—

--a member of Good Shepherd.

And as I looked around

at that funeral—

--I saw a lot of people

who had given of their time and energy
to help Russ during times of struggle.

Taking him to the doctor;

listening to him;

sitting with him;

laughing with him;

crying with him.

And God worked through them,

through you,

to give the gift of hope.

And that also gives the gift of hope to me—
--and to the rest of us.

To know that the Body of Christ is there
to care for one another,
and for people we don't even know yet,
sharing the Hope of Christ with one another.

Would you read verse 13 with me one more time:

May the God of hope fill you with all the joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

That's my hope for you.

In Jesus' name,
Amen