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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“HOPE through PEACE in CHRIST”
Romans 15:4-13

☑ Casual hopes come easily, don’t they? There isn’t much at stake in wishing for a white Christmas or an orange in your stocking.

Profound hope is another story. Hope for abundant life, joy, peace, justice, and love can seem like a luxury reserved for the young, the strong, the naïve.

Most young people can afford to hope. They’ve got their whole lives ahead of them. The world is opening up to them, fresh and new and filled with possibility.

The strong are able to plow through obstacles and power through disappointments. Their hope is guaranteed by their impressive abilities and bountiful resources.

The naïve wear blinders. In the storm they see only the rainbow. In bottomless darkness they always expect the light. They can hardly help but hope!

? What if we are not young, strong, or naïve? Is deep, full-bodied hope available to us? Is profound hope possible? How can we find it?

☐ Please turn with me to Romans 15:4-13. The first and last verses are like bookends that frame the text.

■ Bookend 1) Romans 15:4: **“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.”**

“So that.” *With the aim of. In order that.* What is God’s intent in teaching us endurance and providing us encouragement through the Scriptures? It is that **“we might have hope.”**

■ Bookend 2) verse 13: **“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”**

There is the phrase **“so that”** again. What is the divine purpose in filling us with joy and peace? It is that we **“may overflow with hope.”**

☆ Imagine it! YHWH who eternally was, and is, and is to come; Holy God, who dwells in unapproachable light; the Creator of the universe, in whom all things hold together; the All-Knowing, Everywhere Present, All-Powerful King of the cosmos – cares about your state of mind. It matters to him that I am not left desolate. He **desires that we brim over with a surfeit of hope!**

With God on our side, profound hope is possible. It is available even to the old, the weak, the jaded.

■ What is more, the value of real, substantial hope far exceeds the good feelings it gives us. It has transcendent significance! Romans 15:7-9:

⁷ **Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.**
⁸ **For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth ...**
⁹ **[so] that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:**

**“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;
I will sing the praises of your name.”**

- Verse 11: “And again,

**‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;
let all the peoples extol him.’”**

- Verse 12 reiterates the connection between praising God and having hope: “And again, Isaiah says,

**‘The Root of Jesse will spring up,
one who will arise to rule over the nations;
in him the Gentiles will hope.’”**

Casual hope is fine – there is nothing wrong with it – but it has little intrinsic value. Yet hope for abundant life, joy, peace, justice, and love glorifies God.

☆ Imagine it! Your courageous anticipation, my faith-filled expectation, our deep hope is an act of worship, assuming that the things we hope for are in harmony with the Lord’s perfect will.

By extension, when God’s people give up hope, when Christ Followers wallow in despair, then God is not exalted. When we refuse to hope, the Name of the Lord is dishonored.

God desires that “**we overflow with hope.**” Not only so, good hope glorifies him as an act of worship. This is encouraging, isn’t it? It might be sufficient incentive for a dejected person to dare to hope again.

? However, it does not answer the question *how*. How can “**we overflow with hope**” as aging, injuries, and diseases cause our bodies and minds to decay.

? How can “**we overflow with hope**” when our educational, political, judicial, and economic systems fail us, or our loved ones severely disappoint us?

? How can “**we overflow with hope**” while immorality, injustice, and idolatry infect our culture, our communities, and, let’s be candid, us?

✎ In this text, the apostle Paul has already pointed to two powerful resources for deep, full-bodied hope. One is Scripture, cited in verse 4. The other is trust in God, referenced in verse 13.

Reading, studying, and meditating on the Word tends to buttress hope. The same applies to the investment of confidence in the Father, Son, and Spirit. No surprises there!

✎ But the text discusses another, probably unexpected means to fortify good hope. The third resource is peacemaking, the work of reconciliation and preservation of harmony.

Do you want stronger, more resilient hope that does not depend on good circumstances or human favor? Work for peace, above all within the Church.

Hold on! Wait a minute! Stop!

Have I lost it? Am I grasping at straws? Am I reading into Scripture what is not there?

■ Remember the first bookend? Verse 4: **“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we *might have hope.*”**

■ What immediately follows? Verses 5-6: ⁵ **“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

■ {Rom 1:29} This will not happen if we are divided by **“envy ... strife, deceit and malice.”** Glorifying God **“with one mind and one voice”** is predicated on unity among Christ Followers.

■ Hence in verse 7, the apostle urges: **“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”**

{Ro 5:8; 8:7} This is a tall order! Elsewhere, Paul explains the extent of our acceptance by Christ: **“While we were still sinners,”** and our **“sinful [minds were] hostile to God,”** **“Christ died for us.”**

I sincerely desire to glorify the Lord. I believe that you do, too. If that requires us to **“accept one another,”** then we are willing to do it.

Still, willingness and ability are different things, especially where human personalities are involved. At times, mutual acceptance can seem like a pipe dream.

? How can we live as peacemakers together?

■ Paul prays for us to have **“the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had”** (verse 5).

○ Does that sequence of words sound at all familiar? Hear the Word of the Lord in Philippians 2:5-8:

⁵ **In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had:**

⁶ **Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be used to his
own advantage;**

⁷ **rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.**

⁸ **And being found in appearance as a human
being,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death –
even death on a cross!**

? What attitude of mind did God the Son have?

★ Messiah was selfless, not self-serving. (He did not consider his divinity **“something to be used to his own advantage,”** verse 6).

★ Messiah was self-emptying, not self-satisfying. (**“He made himself nothing,”** literally *emptied himself*, verse 7).

★ Messiah was self-humbling, not self-promoting. (“**He humbled himself,**” verse 7).

★ Messiah was self-denying, not self-protecting. (He was “**obedient to death – even death on a cross!**” verse 8).

Surely, no one is too quirky, too obnoxious, too sinful for us to accept, if we have “**the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had!**”

This would be an impossible dream, if not for the Advent of Jesus.

☑ {Philip Pfatteicher} Last week I said that “**There are three comings of Christ:**” his historical Advent “**in Bethlehem**”; his Second Coming “**in glory at the end of time**”; and his personal, localized return to each of us at the moment of death.

✧ In fact, there is a fourth Advent: The Savior’s continual coming, in which he is constantly present with us through his Spirit and his Word.

{Eph 2:22; Rom 8:29} If we are in Christ, then Christ is in us. We are “**A dwelling in which God lives,**” and we are being “**conformed to the image of his Son.**”

○ {Col 3:12-13} By the power of God’s indwelling Holy Spirit, we are capable of clothing ourselves “**with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.**” We are able to “**bear with each other and forgive one another As the Lord forgave**” us.

○ {Col 3:14-15} And over all these virtues we can “**put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.**”

God is giving us what it takes to “**Let the peace of Christ rule in [our] hearts, since as members of one body [we] were called to peace.**”

Full-bodied hope is not a luxury reserved for the young, the strong, the naïve.

✧ As we embrace Scripture’s teachings, trust in the Lord, and live as peacemakers, the Living God will cause us brim over with a surfeit of resilient expectation.

Romans 15:4-13 is the Word of the Lord.