

Religion and Politics:

Our Hope

Romans 15:7-13

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When I was growing up I always hoped the Minnesota Vikings would make it to the Super Bowl. When they made it (four times), I hoped they would win. Needless to say, my hope was not realized as they lost all four Super Bowls.

Do you ever hope for things? I can name so many things that I hope for right now, and one of my hopes don't include a winning Viking season; that ship sailed. Here are just a few of the things that I hope for. I hope that I don't get CoVid. I hope a vaccine will be invented for CoVid. I hope we have a beautiful fall and short winter. I hope that the election will run smoothly. I hope that all the candidates that I vote for in the upcoming election will win. I hope my daughter and son-in-law will move back to Minnesota. And the list goes on!

We all have things we hope for in our lives. We celebrate when our hopes are fulfilled and we are often disappointed when they aren't. Most of the things in life that we say we "hope" for is really optimism. Optimism is the expectation that things – the weather, human relationships, the economy, the political situation, and so on – will get better. Today we are going to talk about the hope that is in God, which is different from optimism. Hope is the trust that God will fulfill God's promises to us in a way that gets us through whatever life brings. Hope in God is not some optimistic sense that things will turn out the way we want (which is why we lose all hope when our team or candidate doesn't win). And hope in God matters now more than ever as we draw near an election where half the population will be jubilant and half will be in despair. Hope in God is a belief that God will get us through no matter what happens to us, that God is at work beneath and beyond our current circumstances, delivering on the promises given to us to bring us peace. Let's look at what Romans says about hope. Our reading is from Romans 15:7-13 (*The Message* translation).

"So reach out and welcome one another to God's glory. Jesus did it; now you do it! Jesus, staying true to God's purposes, reached out in a special way to the Jewish insiders so that the old ancestral promises would come true for them. As a result, the non-Jewish outsiders have been able to experience mercy and to show appreciation to God. Just think of all the Scriptures that will come true in what we do! For instance: Then I'll join outsiders in a hymn-sing; I'll sing to your name! And this one: Outsiders and insiders, rejoice together! And again: People of all nations, celebrate God! All colors and races, give hearty praise! And Isaiah's word: There's the root of our ancestor Jesse, breaking through the earth and growing tree tall, tall enough for everyone everywhere to see and take hope! Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!"

What does Paul mean by hope as he wrote this scripture? Let me give you some context to the situation at the time. Paul is addressing a situation in Rome when both Jews and Gentiles were worshiping in the synagogue. The thing is the Gentiles and Jews are very different people from very different backgrounds worshiping Jesus. The Jews had been taught the Law from the time they were able to understand. They regulated their lives according to the strict interpretation of the Law. The Law prescribed that Jews were not to associate with Gentiles. And as far as the Gentiles were concerned, they weren't all that interested in associating with the Jews. These were opposing factions who didn't see eye-to-eye on much of anything. They had different ways of living their lives, yet they worshiped the same God, Jesus Christ.

When these two groups would meet to worship, can you imagine the tension in the room and how conflict could arise?

Funny after thousands of years people who believe and worship the same God, Jesus Christ can still experience tension and conflict? Conflict over something such as politics? With the upcoming election, there seems to be more and more tension and conflict between those of us who share the love of Christ. The tensions are growing and the conflict is disturbing.

So where is our hope? Well, here is how Paul handled this in our text. Paul asks them to put aside their

differences so they can worship the same God, the same Jesus they all believe in! Paul calls them to reach out and welcome one another as Jesus welcomed them...listening, understanding, staying true to God's purposes. This can only happen through hope; hope in Christ.

Paul turns the conversation to hope. He encourages the people to live into hope. Hope is trust and hope is waiting. It is the same for us today. Hope is trusting in God, who promises to be with us as we wait through our difficult circumstances; those times where we don't get the results we desire!

Hope is how we wait. Hope in Christ sometimes (more often than not) is what compels us to hang on, though we feel we may lose our grip, though we feel we may lose everything, even though it hurts and it's hard and it's not what we thought it would be.

Hope in God isn't something that makes our wishes come true. Hope is a way of believing that whatever comes our way, God is there and God's love, mercy, grace and peace will get us through whatever life throws at us. Hope is trust and hope is waiting. Let me say that again.

Hope in God isn't something that makes our wishes come true. Hope is a way of believing that whatever comes our way, God is there and God's love, mercy, grace and peace, will get us through whatever life throws at us. Hope is trust and hope is waiting.

As we wait in our lives for things to change, God is with us, always active. Our waiting is not passive, static, or motionless. Waiting is active and hopeful. Waiting is a process, an integration, a time to listen.

It's completely reasonable to look around our world today and feel hopeless. The divisions in our country, the oppression, the growing number in poverty, we may fear that things are getting worse, and that time is getting shorter, and the wait is too long to bear.

That's when we can remember. We can remember our ancestors who waited through slavery to get to the promised land as God was a constant presence on their journey. The Gospel begins with this kind of hopeful waiting. The Israelites had been waiting for hundreds of years, through oppression, violence, enslavement, and trouble, for the Messiah to come and rescue them. They've waited and hope was a function of their struggle. And it made them resilient and imaginative. God always showed up...even as a baby.

Hope meets us where we are and God carries us through it all. And we need that hope more than ever. The challenges we face right now can make the world feel hard, dry and lifeless. Now hear these words of promise and hope from Isaiah:

"There's the root of our ancestor Jesse, breaking through the earth and growing tree tall, tall enough for everyone everywhere to see and take hope! Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!"

The election is almost here. It matters that we vote our conscience and our values. It matters who sits in the White House. But our ultimate hope isn't in a politician. Our ultimate hope is in Jesus Christ. Let's live together well in that hope."

Here are a few next steps that can help us live into hope:

- 1) Prayer. Prayer is available to us 24/7. Jesus is all in, all the time. Be open and honest with him.
- 2) You can pray with others. There is an opportunity to sign up for "Together We Pray" through our website.
- 3) You can make a plan, including finding a person who can share hope with you and also being that person who can share hope with someone else.