

August 21, 2022 Overflowing With Hope Romans 15:7-13

Martin Luther spent the early part of his career in the Church in a dark night of the soul. The more he examined his personal life, the more convinced he became that he was a sinful man and utterly lost. He tried so hard to be the perfect man and he continually faced the reality that he could not be the perfect man. And even if he seemed to make a good start, he would be faced with incidents that made it undeniable that the perfection he sought had alluded him and slipped through his fingers.

He wrote that he had one glimmer of hope that somehow God would save him. He would protest, against his sense of being lost, "I am baptized!" And of course he had been baptized as an infant, a stage of life in which he was incapable of professing his faith. We know this: Martin Luther became the key person in the revival of the Church through what we call The Protestant Reformation. This is the simple truth. The Reformation gave rise to churches that pursued Biblical teaching, the reading and study of the Scriptures and the translation of the Scriptures in the languages of the people so that anyone could read the Bible.

Furthermore, and we often overlook this point, the effect of this movement of earnest seeking after God based on Biblical teaching also revitalized the Church as a whole. The Counter Reformation in what we now call the Roman Catholic Church was a parallel rediscovery of Biblical teaching. The

Church as a whole was changed forever. Perfect? Never. The Church is made up of people and is as strong as their faith, and as weak as their human failings. And in the midst of all that occurred Martin Luther discovered the book of Romans in particular. And it was the result of that fact that taught him as we hold dear, that people are saved not by what they do, but by what God did and does through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and HIS resurrection on the 3rd day. By grace we are saved through faith.

Long before the Reformation, long before the discovery made by Martin Luther, Saul of Tarsus became the apostle Paul. He wrote this letter to Christ's followers in the city of Rome where they were being hunted down and killed for sport. Paul wrote this letter to encourage those believers to hold fast to their faith in Jesus. The hope of eternal life through faith is real. Paul had verified in his own coming to faith, that Jesus had indeed died on the cross, had been buried in the tomb, and had risen on the 3rd day. A Sunday morning, which is why we gather as we do to worship on what we now call the first day of the week.

We can say with Martin Luther, we have been baptized. What that means is that our parents had enough faith, to seek out the church's blessing of their babies. Enough faith to request the ministry of a believing community. Enough faith, perhaps as little as to be compared to a mustard seed, but running against the general currents of their times, seeking the blessing of Almighty God, and the power that was in Jesus,

to touch the lives of their little ones for safety. What else is salvation? It is the seeking of safety in the arms of Jesus the good Shepherd.

We are all reminded today, in what we have witnessed today, of the truth in the Scriptures. “May the God of hope, fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

As you all know, I am approaching the end of my years in ministry. What some will not know, is this precise fact. I was not raised in the Church. But like the baby baptized this morning, my parents took me to the Church and I was baptized as an infant. My family and I did not attend worship on anything like a regular basis. No one would have predicted that my life would unfold as it has. I stumbled into friendships that exposed me to the faith at a time when I was looking for a means of having hope, of being joyful, of finding peace.

I didn't stumble into those relationships at all. My baptism, arranged by my parents, was honoured by God, who redeems and saves. Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying to the family of this infant, that your son is bound to become an evangelist. What I am saying to them and to one and all is this: there is a mysterious power in the reality of having a child baptized. And in ways that we would never anticipate, the seeds of the water, the prayers, the questions and the answers given are honoured by the God who is real, who created this world and us, who gave HIS only begotten Son into the world,

to redeem and save, who poured out HIS HOLY SPIRIT that we might taste the realities mentioned in Romans 15:13...hope, joy, peace, trusting in the Lord, overflowing with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I take this moment to say to everyone present, what we have participated in this morning will bear fruit. One way or another, it will bear fruit. It did in the life of Martin Luther. It did in my life. It will bear fruit in the life of this baby too. Not because I say so. But because the sacraments of God are the sacraments of God. We were requested to touch this baby's life with the power of the God who is. As parents you will see things that will not have been anticipated, things that will surprise you. The grace of God always surprises.

The promise of the 13th verse of Romans 15 is that when no one is looking for it hope will be given. Why? Because God is the God of hope. We sing that little chorus. The Joy of the Lord is my strength. And among all the problems of parenting and providing for your family, there will be moments of surprising joy. When you witness them, I pray you will remember us and this moment in this sacred place, this sacred space. The Christmas carol, Joy To The World is known by all of us. Remember the first line...Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Jesus is the source of joy in our living. There is a reason that Christmas is such a special time of the year. And there is a reason that for some Christmas is a bleak time of the year. The joyful note has to do with Jesus. And if we fail to recognize him we miss the fullness of the joy.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him.” These realities are for all of us. And it is just possible that they may allude us, the hope, the joy, the peace. In part they are the fruit of our trusting in Jesus, our trusting in God.

In fact what Paul reminds us of is just this: hope can be allusive. It is easy, all too easy to slip into hopelessness. Paul made the discovery, to did Martin Luther for that matter, and so did I, when I least expected it, that it is possible, genuinely possible, “to overflow with hope,” as the result of trusting God in Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And this message is not just for the family of the baby we baptized this morning, it is for all of us. In fact one of the things the family has allowed us to do this morning, is to witness the baptism of their infant son.

And we have not just witnessed what they did or said, or the water and the font. They in coming have let us be reminded together, all of us of what the apostle wrote, close to 2,000 years ago, as the result of a parcel of historical realities. Facts. The birth of Jesus. The ministry of Jesus. The death of Jesus on the cross. The resurrection of Jesus on the Sunday morning. The things that happened simply because Jesus followers recognized those facts and lived their lives in light of them.

I want you all to remember this morning, and the words that are part of it. “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.”

Let us pray;

Lord we have prayed for a single infant. We have prayed for a single family. We have prayed for friends who are ill. We have prayed for the Ukraine as it lives with death and destruction. We have prayed for the church, not an institution, but a fellowship of believers, in the midst of a world in need. Fill us with hope. Fill us with joy and peace, as we trust in YOU, Jesus the Lord of life. Cause us to overflow with hope, and may the power of YOUR Holy Spirit, be with us today, tomorrow, and throughout our lives. Amen