

Second Sunday in Advent – Epistle

Cope With Hope

Romans 15:4-13

Second Sunday in Advent

Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

Romans 15: 4Whatever 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. 5May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, 6so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7Welcome one another; therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. 8For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 9and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name”; 10and again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”; 11and again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him”; 12and again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.” 13May 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Abandon Hope, All Who Enter Here.

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *I'm looking forward to it.*

Christmas is coming. We've known that since Halloween. Whether we look forward to getting all the cooking and concerts and parties and shopping behind us or that we just can't wait for presents, either way, we have hope. We need hope to motivate us. The storeowner stocks shelves in hope of selling. We give suggestions in hope that we will get something we want for Christmas. Cancer patients undergo chemotherapy and its side effects in hope of being cured. Hope is the anticipation of a future reward. We do things in order to obtain that reward. To do something without being rewarded feels meaningless. We don't like living without meaning or without goodness or without worth. We need to have a reward!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Now what?*

But once we get the reward and the glow of having it fades, we feel let down. It's the post-Christmas blues. The let down is the loss of hope, no longer having something to look forward to. The hope of reward no longer motivates us and we feel spent and worthless. Another hope has to replace the hope we put in Christmas. Then another hope has to replace Valentine's Day, then Easter, then Memorial Day, summer vacation, Labor Day, Halloween, and Christmas. We go from one thing to another, placing our hope in it. Whatever we put our hope in is our god. Whatever our heart clings to in order to feel good, that is our god. We trust other things besides God to make us good. We get so caught up in having something to look forward to that we pay no attention to others' need for hope. We ignore even those who hope only to eat at least once this week. We do not live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus. (v.

7)

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *It's hopeless.*

Knowing this failure makes us feel like snakes, vipers even. There is wrath coming and we want to flee! (See Gospel link on Matthew 3:7.) We have scorned the glory of God (v. 7). We have looked to other rewards and to other gods. If we do not hope in God, then we do not get God's reward of life or the life that lasts. Having done our best to live right according to other ways, seeking different rewards, won't earn us any credit with God. God will leave us to the rewards we have chosen. But the rewards we have chosen are only temporary, and have no power to give life or the life that lasts. When death comes we have no hope, for we are not sure that there is anything beyond death. We cannot even trust the mercy of God, for that mercy demands that we show mercy during our life. So God's mercy is no comfort.

PROGNOSIS: Hoping in Christ Because the Scriptures Point to Him.

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Jesus looks forward to being raised up.*

The steadfastness and encouragement of the Scriptures give us hope, because they were written to instruct us about Christ. Christ is written of because Christ welcomed us. Christ's mercy for us is new, for he is not counting our sin of false hopes against us but forgives us. Instead, he counts our false hopes against himself. He declares that he is the new way God gives us hope, the only way that gives the life that lasts. However, those who insist on other hopes, even God-given hopes like the law, stop Jesus from ruining their false hope by crucifying him. By crucifying Jesus, he suffers God's demand that those who had false hopes be given the true end of those false hopes. Yet those were our false hopes. God sees that Jesus had hope only in

God, ("Into your hands I commend my spirit," Luke 23:46), so God raises Jesus from the dead! God raises Jesus up to be our hope for mercy, and our hope for life eternal.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Now I get it!*

Jesus gives us himself as our reward. We trust in him as God's mercy for us, as God's gift of life for us, and as God's forgiveness of us. We hope for the reward of Jesus, the reward of his resurrection, even through death. We hope that the reward of Jesus' life that lasts is ours, even when we are alone in a hospital bed, in a cancer treatment center, or stocking shelves in a store. And as our hope is in Jesus, God reckons us right to receive mercy, all for the sake of Christ who died and rose for us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *I am hopeful.*

Hope is now eternal in us, because Jesus is risen. This new hope motivates us, gets us out of bed, and moves us to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus. "In accordance with Christ" Jesus means we welcome each other with mercy instead of demanding that the other pass some kind of test in regard to race, gender, job, orientation, age, marital status, and so on. We help preserve each other by giving care and help and prayer so that Christ can continue to minister to each. When Christ is known in such acts, there is hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 13). It is hope in Christ that motivates us to do our daily work, to be faithful to our spouse, to love our children or parents, to look forward to Christmas as the hope that will not disappoint us.