



## “The God of Hope” (Romans 15:1–13)(12.6.20)

Romans 15:1–13 (NIV84)

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. <sup>3</sup> For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” <sup>4</sup> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

<sup>5</sup> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup> Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. <sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs <sup>9</sup> so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written:

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;  
I will sing hymns to your name.”

<sup>10</sup> Again, it says,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

<sup>11</sup> And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,  
and sing praises to him, all you peoples.”

<sup>12</sup> And again, Isaiah says,

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

<sup>13</sup> 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.

**The word of God for the people of God.**

Title: **“The God of Hope”**

LET US PRAY.



### INTRODUCTION:

It has been said that art imitates life. Others have argued that life imitates art. Yes, it is true that art in every form is influenced by the culture from which it is birthed. It is also true that what happens in the arts and the subsidiary of entertainment has a substantial impact on the culture. There is no doubt that books, music, movies, and television mold people’s thinking and beliefs. So, there is an intertwining of one with the other.

You will see in this picture a long list of phone numbers to help lines. One of my clergy Facebook friends posted it on her timeline. Suicide; bullying; Self harm; sexual assault; lifeline; grief support; depression; drug/alcohol; eating disorder; mental health; and abuse. This is not a complete list of all the societal ills. I am sure you can come up with several other areas where people need help.



There are also many macro level issues that affect the well-being of individuals. We have divisive politics; economic hardships; and of course, the COVID-19 pandemic. In many parts of the world there is religious persecution, which includes killing. There are civil wars and other armed conflicts. We are told that total environmental collapse is imminent due to global climate change.

The anxiety is amplified because we are under a constant barrage of information overload. We cannot consume, contemplate, and coalesce this firehose of data and facts. It is overwhelming to try

to sift through it all and find the truth. Almost by definition, news is bad news.



So, I really should not have been surprised to notice how much hopelessness is depicted in the arts and entertainment. Though I thought what I was selecting to watch and read was somewhat random, a lack of hope was a common theme. When human beings lack hope, it affects relationships, mental health, physical health, and spiritual well-being. Advent is a season of hope. It is a season of anticipation. We look back to Jesus' birth and see the Messiah who entered human history to change it forever. And we look to the future when the King of kings and Lord of lords will come again and consummate human history. Yes, as we sang a

few minutes ago: Come, thou long-expected Jesus, hope of all the earth thou art! That promise informs our daily Christian walk. We have a real hope and that is the God of Hope.

Paul quotes Isaiah, "The Root of Jesse (which is Jesus) will spring up, One who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will **hope** in Him." This is repeated twice in the Book of Revelation.

BODY:

On Wednesday afternoon, I went to Wimberg Funeral Home. I was there to do a funeral for a family that I had never met. Apparently, this is becoming a more and more common occurrence because the funeral director asked me if she could call me to do other funerals. That means that more and more people have no church family. They have no pastor.

Although a great number of people have abandoned the Church, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm still resonates. It was printed on one of those laminated cards with a picture of the deceased. Instead of just reading it to them, I had them all read it together. For thousands of years this psalm has spoken to hearts and souls to bring comfort. It offers the hope of the Good Shepherd. Yes, peace, righteousness, provision and protection are promised. At the same time it acknowledges that we will walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. But, the Good Shepherd's presence is with us. And, we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Yes, the God of Hope has spoken to our hearts.

I explained what Paul taught that Christians do not grieve like those who have no hope. Our hope is no whimsical emotion, but is based on the concrete foundation of the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus told us that because He lives, we will live also. Grieving is human and healthy for healing...when you have the God of Hope living within you.

I shared the gospel story from which our church has derived its name, the Walk to Emmaus. I told them that as Christians, our grief is framed in the blessed hope of our heavenly reward. In your grief, walk with Jesus. Extend the hospitality of your heart to Jesus. He will speak to you through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit will bear witness with your spirit to the way, the truth, and the life. I don't know how many times during the service I raised the name of Jesus, but it was a whole bunch. I have nothing better to offer.

On Wednesday night, Carol and I had our weekly visit with my son's family in Port Republic. A few of the grandchildren were in the living room, a couple playing a video game while two others worked on a jigsaw puzzle. There was fun family bantering back and forth. I shared with them that I was going to preach about hope and asked if they knew any stories that dealt with hope.

Rachel told me that she had read a book called *Daring to Hope* (Finding God's Goodness in the Broken and the Beautiful) by Katie Davis Majors. Rachel had read the author's first book in high school and this was the follow-up. Of course, she connected to it because it dealt with a faithful young woman who fresh out of high school went off to be a missionary.

The opening chapter of the book is titled "An Invitation to Hope." Here is an excerpt:



"Ten years ago I moved across the ocean, from Tennessee to Uganda, full of something that I thought was hope but in reality was more like naïve optimism. If you had asked me then how the Lord might most deepen my relationship with Him, I would have had all kinds of answers. At the old and wise age of nineteen, I thought I knew some things. I was going to give my life away for Jesus. I was going to change lives by teaching people the Gospel of Christ and helping provide for their basic needs. God was going to use me. I was going to be the answer.

I did not know the beauty that would find me in a life poured out for Him, the joy of calling little ones "daughter" and pressing into Him to learn what that really meant, the exhilaration of true and undefiled worship in a sea of people who did not speak the same language but worshipped the same God, the thrill of witnessing a life changed due to basic and simple provision of such things as medical care and nutritional assistance.

I did not know the pain that awaited me on the other side of the ocean, on the other side of humility, where I would recognize just how little I had to offer. I did not know that a baby girl would call me "Mommy" for years and then I would have to give her up. I did not know that I would carry the responsibility of looking into a mother's face and telling her that her child was not going to live. I did not know that I would forge deep friendships with people imprisoned by addiction I could not help them fight, no matter how I tried. I did not know that I would provide care, for months at a time, for people living with HIV, desperately begging God to spare their lives, only to later find myself holding their hands as they slipped into eternity with Him on the other side.

And I did not know that in the middle of much pain and grief and loss, I would experience a joy and a peace that far surpassed human understanding. Reality would shatter my optimism, but I would realize that my positivity was only a cheap substitute for true hope anyway. The Lord would take the darkness and make it my secret place, the place where I knew Him more intimately and deeply than I had ever fathomed possible. In the middle of the hurricane that surrounded me, I would experience a true Comfort so deep, so clear, that it simply could not be denied. It was Jesus. He was near.

### **In our pain, He is near.**

During sleepless nights and the death of friends and the breaking of families, Christ is all that remains constant and He is the only One who is sufficient. He holds my hands. He cups my face. He is near, and He whispers of a day when the pain is gone and I can fall on my face and worship Him forever.

Over the years, my packaged faith of all the right and wrong answers has been enveloped in a personal touch from the living God. My grief was His grief and my joy was His joy. In my darkness, I knew Him and He knew me. In the midst of pain I would not have chosen, He was real and undeniable and true. When life was not what I expected, where hope was not what I thought, He carved a space in my heart for Him.

This didn't make the pain easy. Some days, prayers seemed to go unanswered and loss overwhelmed our lives. I still lay prostrate on the bathroom floor and beat my hands against the hard tile and begged the Lord that I would not have to bury yet another friend. I still cried tears that threatened to take my breath away as I realized the depth of the suffering of the people around me, grief that would never end, not until Jesus comes back.

No, He didn't make the pain easy. But He made it beautiful. He held me close and whispered secrets to me and revealed things about Himself that I had not yet known. He scooped me into His big loving arms and held me in tenderness unlike any I had ever experienced.

I did not find all the answers to my questions. In fact, I might have more questions now that I did before. But I have found deep intimacy with the One who formed me and knows my heart. He has taught me His secrets in the darkness. **He has taught me true and unwavering hope in Him."**

**That is a real-life powerful testimony!** Katie Majors begins to expand our understanding of hope.



In one of the movies I watched where there was so much hopelessness, the minister was reading a book about Thomas Merton. Merton was an American Trappist monk, writer, theologian, mystic, poet, social activist and scholar who died in 1968. He wrote a lot about hope:

"A life that is without problems may literally be more hopeless than one that always verges on despair."

"Nothing created is of any ultimate use without hope. To place your trust in visible things is to live in despair."

"Without hope, our faith gives us only an acquaintance with God. Without love and hope, faith only knows Him as a stranger."

Paul tells us in this 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans that the prophecy of scripture is true. One way we know it is true is that it shows life as it really is...hard, raw, and challenging. Human nature is not sugar-coated. Even the heroes' flaws are revealed. Through the scriptures we are given the strength and endurance we need. They give us hope by seeing how God has worked in the past. They give us hope by showing us the kingdom of God that shall come.

What a blessed proclamation we find in the 13<sup>th</sup> verse: 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. Are we a people that overflow with hope? We need to be. Our families need us to be. Our neighbors need us to be. When so many are floundering in hopelessness and despair, we can share the name above all names: the Lord Jesus Christ.

**CONCLUSION:**

I think I will give the funeral director at Wimberg Funeral Home my card so she can call me again. People need the God of Hope. In their grief, they may never be more ready to reach for the hope found in Jesus. We all need the presence of Jesus within us. May the power of the Holy Spirit create a surge of hope that compels sharing the good news of Jesus.

Katie Majors did a lot of her ministry in the kitchen of her home. She wrote, "Directly above the oven are painted these words of Acts: "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." This is my deep desire. I know it like I know by own breath: time passes, and these people will go, heading off to new places and new futures, and only He will remain. I serve meals in this kitchen, but I want to serve what

really counts. I want to offer all who pass through this place the Living Bread, the only food that truly fills.”

In a few minutes, we will have special music, the hymn, Hope of the World. Then we will share bread and grape in the celebration of Holy Communion. Let us prepare our hearts to commune with the God of Hope.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.