

ABOUNDING IN HOPE

(Romans 15: 4-13)

Intro: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
So that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope.
-Romans 15:13.

Jesus came into the world.
-So that we might have hope.

Holy Scriptures were written.
-So that we might have hope.

God blesses us with the gift of faith.
-So that we might have hope.

I. Hope Can Be Hard To Come By.

A. Think Of The Many Situations Which Can Seem Hopeless.

1. Being bullied at school.
2. Studying a subject.
 - a. Isn't interesting.
 - b. Doesn't make sense.
3. Looking for a job.
 - a. With decent:
 - Pay.
 - Benefits.
 - b. Appropriate to your skill level.
 - c. In an economy.
 - Downsizing.
 - Outsourcing.
4. Being buried under a mountain of debt.
 - a. From school loans.
 - b. From a family emergency.
5. Suffering from an illness.
 - a. Doesn't respond to treatment.
 - b. For which there is no cure.
6. Trying to fit:
 - a. Too many activities.
 - b. Too many commitments.
 - Into a limited amount of time.

7. Loneliness.
8. Grief.
9. Addiction.
10. Violence.
11. War.
12. Racism.
13. Political stalemates and gridlock.
14. Finding an organist.
 - a. Whose tenure might be:
 - As long.
 - Longer.
 - #Than my own.
 - b. Who will be available to play for:
 - Christmas Eve.
 - Christmas Day.
 - Next Sunday.
15. You may have your own set of circumstances which seem hopeless.

B. Then There Is The Problem Of Sin.

1. You have it.
 - a. I have it.
 - b. We all have it.
2. We do the same ungodly things.
 - a. Over and over again.
3. We invent new and different ways.
 - a. Offending God.
 - b. Offending our neighbor.
 - Sins of omission.
 - Sins of commission.
4. We hear the voice of God.
 - a. In the person of:
 - John the Baptizer.
 - Jesus.
 - b. Calling us to repent.
 - To shape up.
 - To change our ways.
5. Maybe:
 - a. We turn a deaf ear.
 - b. We try it once or twice.
 - c. We resolve to do better next time.
6. We stand under God's judgment.
 - a. Ax.
 - b. Fire.
 - Unquenchable fire.

II. So Where Is The Hope?

A. Jesus Came Into The World So That We Might Have Hope.

1. Jesus came to deal with the big problem.
 - a. Sin problem.
 - b. Judgment problem.
2. An ax was laid to his roots.
 - a. Cut down by the cross.
 - b. So that we might be spared the ax.
3. He felt the fire:
 - a. On his back.
 - b. On his scalp.
 - c. On his hands.
 - d. On his feet.
 - So that we might be spared the fire.
4. So we might have hope.
 - a. Faith.
 - b. Forgiveness.
 - c. Eternal life.
5. We have signs of hope.
 - a. Waters of Holy Baptism.
 - b. Bread and wine of the Holy Meal.
 - c. Word.
 - Written.
 - Proclaimed.
6. May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.
 - a. So that by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. You may abound in hope.

B. Holy Scriptures Were Written So That We Might Have Hope.

1. Scriptures are not a history book per se.
 - a. Although they certainly contain stories of historical events.
 - People of Israel.
 - Jesus.
 - Apostles.
 - b. Scriptures are more than that.
2. Scriptures are not a science book per se.
 - a. Although they certainly present a scientific world view.
 - Of ancient peoples.
 - Not necessarily our own.
 - b. Scriptures are more than that.
3. Scriptures are more than an ethical rule book.
 - a. Do's and don'ts for every situation.
 - b. Lots of situations don't get covered.

4. Scriptures are a Book of Faith.
 - a. Instruction.
 - b. Encouragement.
 - So that we might have hope.
 - #Hope for eternity.
 - *Of course.
 - #Hope for dealing with the problems of this world.
 - *Bullies.
 - *Debt.
 - *Illness.
 - *Grief.
 - One of the Scriptures I like to come back to from time to time.
 - #2 Corinthians 4:8-9 (Today's English Version).
 - *We are often troubled,
 - +But not crushed;
 - *Sometimes in doubt,
 - +But never in despair;
 - *There are many enemies,
 - +But we are never without a friend;
 - *And though badly hurt at times,
 - +We are not destroyed.
 - Scriptures were written so that we might have hope.
 - #In the midst of the:
 - *Trouble.
 - *Doubt.
 - *Strife.
 - *Pain.
 - #That even when the ax is laid to the roots.
 - *New branch might sprout from the stump.
 - +My Certificate of Ordination.
 - =Has the Seminex symbol on it.
 - Stump.
 - #Symbolizing our being cut off.
 - *From the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.
 - New sprout growing out of the stump.
 - #In the form of a cross.
 - =Symbol of hope.
 - +When I was on vicarage/internship.
 - =In Manhattan, Kansas.
 - =There was a park.
 - Near my apartment.
 - #In the days before an arthritic toe.
 - *Got me on a bicycle.
 - #I ran around the park for exercise.

- There were a number of stumps.
 - #Along the jogging path.
 - #Dutch elm disease had claimed a lot of trees.
- But there was one stump.
 - #Had a new shoot sprouting from it.
- Sign of hope.
- +After Israel's United Monarchy came to an end.
 - =After the death of Solomon.
 - There was a Civil War.
 - #Dividing the land between North and South.
 - =Northern Kingdom of Israel.
 - Overrun by the Assyrians (722 B.C.).
 - =Southern Kingdom of Judah.
 - Exiled in Babylon (587/6 B.C.).
 - =It looked like the end of the line.
 - For God's chosen people.
 - =God promised through the prophet Isaiah.
 - New branch would grow from the stump.
 - #New leader.
 - *Messiah.
 - *Savior.
 - #New day.
 - *Righteousness.
 - *Peace.
 - +When lions and lambs.
 - =Would lie down together.
- #Day of hope.

- God's word:
 - #Written.
 - #Proclaimed.
 - *Promises:
 - +Branch from the stump.
 - +New life from the deadwood.
 - *Signs of hope.

5. May the God of Hope fill you will all joy and peace in believing,
 - a. So that by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. You may abound in hope.

C. God Blesses Us With The Gift Of Faith So That We Might Have Hope.

1. God promises us:
 - a. Not just the strength to endure difficult times.
 - b. But the faith that enables us to abound in hope.
 - In good times.
 - In bad.

2. I have told you about Richard.
 - a. Member of the St. Louis County Jail Alumni Association.
 - One of my prison pen pals.
 - #For the last 20 years.
 - b. Richard killed his girlfriend.
 - Fit of passion.
 - Heat of the moment.
 - c. When Richard was arrested.
 - He was placed in an isolation cell.
 - #Because there were threats on his life.
 - *Richard was a former police officer.
 - +Jail isn't always a welcoming place.
 - =For former police officers.
 - *Richard's girlfriend's family.
 - +Had a contract out on him.
 - Richard was afraid to come out of his cell for:
 - #Bible study.
 - #Worship.
 - So I started meeting with Richard one-on-one.
 - #During our first meeting.
 - *I gave Richard a Bible.
 - +Richard began to read.
 - #In time Richard worked up the courage to attend:
 - *First, my Bible study.
 - *Then, my worship service.
 - +When there no problems.
 - =Richard started attending every religious service.
 - That was available in the jail.
 - One day Richard asked me for a new Bible.
 - #He had worn the first one out through reading it.
 - *He had tried holding it together.
 - +With band-aids he got from the nurse.
 - *But his Bible was literally falling apart.
 - +So I gave him a new one.
 - Then it seemed like every time I turned around.
 - #Richard was asking me for:
 - *Another Bible.
 - *Another Bible.
 - *Another Bible.
 - #These weren't for Richard.
 - *These were for the inmates in the cells around him.
 - +To whom Richard was witnessing.

- d. Richard was found guilty.
 - He was sentenced to "life plus 15."
 - Because he had been a police officer.
 - #He didn't do his time in Missouri.
 - #He was sent to Minnesota.
 - *Through an interstate compact.
 - +Which turned out to be a blessing in disguise.
 - =He was further away from family.
 - =But he was able to pursue his education.
- e. Richard could have gone to prison with a chip on his shoulder.
 - Life plus 15.
 - #What did he have to lose?
 - Richard went to prison with:
 - #Faith.
 - #Hope.
 - *He read his Bible.
 - *He went to church.
 - *He witnessed to others.
 - +Inmates.
 - +Staff.
 - *He earned a college degree (drug and alcohol counseling).
 - +One course at a time.
 - =Paying for it with prison wages.
 - +Something he couldn't have done in Missouri.
 - =Which had entirely done away with higher education.
 - *He lived out his faith.
 - +In word.
 - +In deed.
 - =In 20 years.
 - He never got into a fight.
 - He never got a write-up.
 - He never went to the hole.
 - f. Few years ago.
 - Richard went up for parole.
 - #He asked me to write a letter for him.
 - *To the Board of Probation and Parole.
 - #I was happy to do it.
 - Parole Board turned Richard down.
 - #Not because of my letter.
 - *I don't think.
 - Richard might have lost:
 - #Faith.
 - #Hope.
 - *But he didn't.

- g. Last year.
 - Richard came up for parole again.
 - #Again he asked me to write a letter.
 - #Again I was happy to do so.
 - Richard was approved for parole.
 - #He was given an outdate of November 21, 2010.
- h. Month ago.
 - Unbeknownst to me.
 - Richard was transferred.
 - #From Minnesota.
 - #To Missouri.
 - *In preparation for his release.
- i. November 21.
 - Came.
 - Went.
 - #He wasn't released.
 - #He might have spent the day:
 - *Jumping up and down.
 - *Rattling the bars.
 - *Demanding an explanation.
 - #Instead he spent the day:
 - *Reading his Bible.
 - *Witnessing to his cellie.
 - #What Richard didn't know.
 - *Missouri doesn't release parolees on the weekend.
 - +Monday-Friday.
 - +8-5.
 - *November 21st was a Sunday.
- j. Richard was paroled on November 22nd.
 - Last piece of mail Richard received.
 - #Before he left Minnesota.
 - *From me.
 - *Had my phone number on it.
 - This week Richard and I talked.
 - #For the first time in almost 20 years.
 - What a blessing!
 - #To hear that voice filled with:
 - *Faith.
 - *Hope.

Concl: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.
 -So that by the power of the Holy Spirit,
 -You may abound in hope.