

Reading: Romans 15:1-13 (NT page 1141)

### **Background to the reading**

The letter to the Romans was written by the apostle Paul around 55-56 AD when he was staying in Corinth. His stay in Corinth was a difficult one which makes his words of hope even more remarkable.

Rome was during the time of writing the capital of the Roman empire. It had a very large Jewish population. The letter of the Romans was directed to the Jews and the Gentiles who attended the synagogues. Although Paul included the Gentiles his letter assumed a knowledge of the Old Testament as he quoted different passages in his letter to the Romans.

The first mention of people from Rome was mentioned at the outpouring of God's Spirit. From the letter itself we can get a good picture of the circumstances of the house churches in Rome. The most Jews in Rome would have been poor and had very low status. Most of them would have been afraid to falling victim of slavery. The Christian followers lived daily in dreadful tension with the local government because the powers in charge were suspicious of any club, or society or religion that was not part of the norm. They were even suspicious of the Jews as a nation. We know that during the reign of the emperor Claudius that all Jews and Christians were banned from the city. But it seems as if the Christians in Rome persevered in their faith despite all the difficult circumstances that challenged them on a daily basis.

Paul's own personal circumstances was also not the best. We know that he was in Corinth fighting a fearsome battle over his authority as an apostle. He was also preparing himself to go to Jerusalem. He was in two minds because on the one hand he feared for his own personal safety in Judea and secondly he was not sure how the Jews would react to the support he received

from the “gentile converts”. But despite this, the letter to the Romans shows his deep rooted faith and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in this context that we need to understand each and every word written in this letter.

Our reading this morning follows on after Paul reminded the Christians of Rome of their obligations as believers in Christ especially when it comes to the eating of unclean food. He says in our reading that they must be mindful of those who are weak. He regards himself as one of the faithfully strong - whose faith in Christ allowed them to partake with a clear conscience of food even food that would have been regarded to be ceremonially unclean. They were free from ceremonial obligations, but they remained under the obligations of love. And because of their shared love in Christ; they were to bear the weaknesses of those who were not so strong. Rather than insisting on their own way, they were to be supportive and helpful to those who did not have a strong faith just like what Jesus did. He took on the sins of others to die on their behalf on a cross. Paul then quotes from Psalm 69:9 to make the point even clearer. Psalm 69 is a psalm of the righteous sufferer which Paul applies to Jesus’ suffering and death.

Paul urges the congregation to be united in their faith, and hope. The word hope plays a very important role in the letter to the Romans. This word occurs 17 times in this letter. And the source of hope is God which is recorded in the Scriptures. This theme of hope is also repeated in verse 13 whereby it is stressed that God is the God of hope!

**THEY** must be of one mind and be praising God with one voice.

From verse 7 to 12 Paul quotes again from different passages from the Old Testament to emphasize the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people – even the Gentiles.

Paul concludes in Verse 13 with a prayer of blessing. Letters often included a prayer or well-wishing for someone's health, especially in the opening and at the end. This have lead some researchers to believe that verse 13 is actually the closing of the entire letter to the Romans. But off course it is only speculation.

## **MP 16                      All my hope on God is founded**

### **Sermon**

The text for the sermon is verse 13: "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."

What is hope?

Like I said in the background info, the word "hope" plays a very important part in the theology of Paul. The word for hope Ἐλπίδος, Ἐλπίζω means to look forward with trust and confidence.

But hope is not an abstract theme or word. It is not something that grows on trees. God is the source of hope. He created hope through the redemption of Jesus Christ. Hope, faith, and love are the sides of the same coin. The one presupposes the other. To have faith in God is to have the living hope. We often experience hope in dire and needy situations because it is God through his Holy Spirit that keeps us going through hope. But hope is not tied to emotions or circumstances. It is a loving gift from God. It is only possible because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We that have faith have the living hope of the eternal life when we all be in the Kingdom of God.

So if we have faith in God we have access to His hope. And a consequence of this is joy and peace that is timeless. When we have hope we can walk away from any grave knowing that my

hope in God is founded, knowing that I have a peace that my beloved is with God in all eternity, having joy that God is a God of miracles and love, knowing that He will make my faith strong to hold on to Him because hope changes the here and the now of every event even the ones that we dread and fear.

Hope happens in the business of life in all situations through big and small miracles of God's love. Hope can be found in a stranger's smile, in a handshake of strength, in the helpful hints of a security guard to get out of a narrow parking space, in the words of friends after a tragedy, in the prayers of people.

Hope is to stand at the bedside of a beloved friend, family member, mother, father, sister, son or daughter – knowing that this body is only a “tent” and God will take care of it, knowing that my mother, father, sister, brother, son or daughter is safe in the hands of God.

May God help us all to have hope of the life to come, a life that will be far better than the one we currently know. And may His living hope help us all through when the storms want to blow our life houses apart!

Amen

### **Responding to God's word**

Our offerings are given for the ministry and mission of the church while we sing **MP 18: “All over the world”**.

Prayer of thanksgiving: C Abraham

**MP 689**                    **Thine be the glory**

**Benediction Receive the blessing of God and go in peace:**

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.

And the blessing of God almighty,  
God the Father, God the Son,  
and God the Holy Spirit

Be with you all

Now and for evermore **Sung Amen**