

SERMON FOR DECEMBER 4, 2022

TEXT: ROMANS 15: 4-13

THEME: HOPE

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

In the name of Jesus:

Do you remember who said these words: "It was a dark and stormy night." No, it isn't a famous poet or writer, these words were said by the beloved pooch Snoopy, the beagle in Charles Schulz' comic strip called Peanuts. Snoopy was a cultured and accomplished beagle: he flew the Sopwith Camel in World War I, he collected fine art, and he was never in the doghouse, he slept ON his doghouse! Snoopy is known for all of that, and for proclaiming the now famous words: "it was a dark and stormy night." Snoopy was one smart beagle! For when he was a world famous author, and even though the publisher always rejected his stories, Snoopy began his story, not with the line, once upon a time, but with the line made famous by the English novelist Edward Bulwer- Lytton. Lucy and Linus encouraged Snoopy to find another beginning to his story, such as "Once upon a time." But Snoopy was persistent, he began his story, "Once upon a time, it was a dark and stormy night." When Charles Schulz concluded writing the Peanuts comic strip in February 2000, Snoopy still was writing about that dark and stormy night.

Snoopy, I believe, got it right. It is a dark and stormy night. It has always been dark and stormy in the world in which we live. If you need any proof, just look at the past, you can even look at the present and see that the world we live in is dark and stormy. Not a week goes by without us hearing about another shooting in a public place, killing innocent people. Killing and death is all around us. We see images of death from the war in Ukraine, we drive by funeral homes with lines out the door for visitation hours at the death of someone's friend or family member. The times we are living in are dark and stormy times for everyone.

You know of your own dark and stormy nights too, don't you? Perhaps you have experienced death up close and personal this past year, as someone near and dear to you has died recently and there will be a spot empty at the Christmas table this year.

Others may experience the dark and stormy night of life in a different way. There are those who don't look forward to Christmas because in the midst of the singing Joy to the World, their lives are filled with darkness, sorrow, and depression. No matter how hard they try, they can't 'get up' to celebrate the season. The darkness of depression and mental illness clouds the celebration.

Maybe you have experienced the sorrow of a change in your family situation this past year. Your family has been torn apart by arguments, there is strife in your household. Christmas isn't a time of joy when family members are arguing and seemingly at each other's throats during the holidays.

These are dark and stormy days and nights for you and everyone around you. The darkness and storms of life come at each of us constantly and consistently. No matter how well prepared you may think that you are for the "unexpected", the storms of life come at you, rolling in from the distance, and then all of a sudden, you are knee deep in despair. Life not only comes at you fast, but also so does sorrow and despair.

God, though, is merciful and does not want you to live without hope. Yes, there is sorrow and despair in your life and in the world. God declares that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The sorrow and despair are the spoiled fruits of the sin that has corrupted our world and your life. Sorrow and despair and cause us to question if God exists, if He cares, if He is really with us. But God, who is merciful, doesn't desire that you fall into despair and live your life without hope. For in the midst of your sinfulness, in the midst of your sorrow and despair, God's Good News is for you! It is as the Apostle Paul writes: For whatever was written in former days was written for

our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

And you do have hope, in Jesus! This hope that Jesus gives is not a pie in the sky type of hope. It isn't a hope built on empty words. God doesn't say, "Keep a stiff upper lip." "Buck up, bucko, things will get better." No, God instead gives you hope, by giving you Himself.

This is why God has given to you the Holy Scriptures. "For whatever was written in the former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." And we do have hope. God here in this passage tells you and me to remain under His Word. God works through His Word and brings blessings in and through His Word and that Word does not disappoint. God's Good News is that He blesses you in His Word with this Good News of Jesus Christ, that "we glorify God the Father who has welcomed you in Christ." How has God welcomed you?

God welcomes sinners! God loves the sinner, God has come to live with sinners, to save sinners, that is why He sent Jesus. Jesus lived with sinners, He suffered with sinners, He died for sinners. All this so that God would make the sinner welcome in His sight through His Son Jesus Christ.

There were many instances in Jesus' life and ministry where He sat down and ate a meal with the downtrodden, the outcast, those who were without hope. Jesus went out of His way to live among those who were hopeless and give them hope. Jesus lived His life to welcome sinners. Remember the time when one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him? Jesus went into this man's home, and while Jesus was at the table getting ready to eat, a woman of the city (as the Bible puts it) came up to Jesus and began to weep so profusely that Jesus' feet became wet, so she wiped His feet with her hair. The host of the dinner was indignant, that Jesus would even associate with sinners. But Jesus answered the man in his indignation by telling him that this woman's, indeed every sinner's sin is forgiven, because Jesus came to forgive sinners.

The forgiveness that Jesus gives hope to the hopeless, light to the darkness, and joy to those who are in sorrow. Christ has come to show mercy to sinners. Christ has come to show mercy to you. He has come to forgive you your sin. Your sins are forgiven in Christ! For Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God did not count His equality with God a thing to be grasped but He made Himself nothing, taking on Himself the sins of the world, taking upon Himself your sins so that through faith in Jesus God has forgiven you your sins. You belong to Him, and nothing will separate you from His love.

He comes to give you His forgiveness, His love, His every blessing in His Word, in the Absolution or the Forgiveness of your sins, in your Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper.

This is the Good News of the Bible! The promises of the Old Testament bring hope to the hopeless. God says in His Word: "Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of Hope, today I declare that I will restore to you double." (Zech 9:12). This Hope is given to you in Christ! You receive God's blessings and have hope through faith in Jesus!

You who believe in Jesus are called to have hope, and this hope you have in Christ will never disappoint! The Psalmist calls God's people to hope in the Lord, for the Lord is your ever present Help in time of trouble. Through faith in Jesus you have access to the Heavenly Father and His grace that is sufficient for all of your needs. That is why we rejoice in the hope we have because God gives Help to those who trust in the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Even though we live in dark and troubled times, we know for certain that God will work all things to the good of His children, who are called to be His own in Christ. And that is why we as Christians can be patient in times of trouble, for we know that through the encouragement of the Scriptures we always have hope in Christ!

Are you in a place in life where you are going through trials and tribulations? Are you going through a dark and stormy time? Do you feel as if you are without hope? Then go to God where He can be found: in His Word! Immerse yourself in God's Word, the Holy Scriptures. The Good News is that the Promised Root of Jesse, Jesus, promised in the Old Testament, HAS COME, AND IN HIM, IN JESUS WE HAVE HOPE! God blesses in and through His Word. God blesses those who are in Jesus, and this blessing is as powerful today as it has been when Paul wrote about this blessing: "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."

This hope is yours in Jesus Christ. Grab hold of it, believe it, live it, for this Hope is for you! In the dark and stormy nights that will come, and they will come, know this, that Christ has overcome the world for you! Nothing will separate you from God's love! Jesus is your Hope now and forever!

Amen