

# Abound in Hope / Evening Service

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[ 0 : 00 ]     Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening? In Christ's name, amen. Please, grab a seat. Let me welcome you again.

My name's Aaron. I'm the minister for this service. Tonight, we've sort of truncated our service. If you're just joining us for the first time and don't know what's going on. So we're squeezing everything into basically sort of 20 minutes here.

And the reason we're doing that is because we have this wonderful band called Ordinary Time who are going to play for us, who are not a random band. I went to school with Jill and Ben.

I don't think we ever crossed over, but we know each other from the neighborhood. And I sung in Ben Kaiser's gospel choir. Didn't I? I did. The voice of a little Kiwi angel is what somebody once said.

I'm actually quoting myself. But it's still a quote though, right? So it's still legit. So it was this great choir, but you just hear this whiny, praise God.

[ 1 : 05 ]     You can just hear it through all the mixes. It was terrible. That was terrible. But anyway, thanks for having me. It's important to include people. So because we have a concert on tonight after the sermon, this is just going to be a cheeky little 10-minute sermon, okay, looking at the passage tonight.

So this is the second week of Advent. And what we've been doing is over these four weeks, is we're going to look at some practices to help us get our head in the game for Christmas.

And I'll explain what that means shortly. So last week the practice was putting on Christ. And this week the practice is abounding in hope. And you heard our passage, Romans 15.

And in it what Paul does is he takes this small sort of domestic issue happening in the local church in Rome here. And he sort of just explodes it.

So there's this sort of seemingly trivial issue going on that's hinted at at the beginning of our passage where it talks about the weak and the strong. And it's explained more in the previous passage. But basically what's going on is there's, in the church in Rome, there's this mix of Jewish people and Gentile people and people of sort of different levels of maturity in their faith.

[ 2 : 18 ]     And there's these arguments going on about whether we should keep certain holy days holy or not, should you drink alcohol or not, that kind of stuff. And Paul says, look, this is the previous chapter.

He goes, look, guys, look, some of you feel like it's okay to drink. Clearly not Anglicans here. Some of you feel like it's okay to drink. Others don't. For those of you who think it's okay to drink alcohol, that's going to be really confusing and distressing for some of the other folks.

So just sort of, you know, just stop. Don't do it around them. Just because you feel like you're free to do it, don't do it around them. It's discouraging for them. So that's Paul's first tack at sort of dealing with this domestic issue happening in the church.

But in chapter 15, he sort of ratchets the whole thing up. And rather than ending it by saying, so come on, guys, let's be sensitive. That's not his main point. And see what he does here is he gives them this huge cosmic theological vision.

So he tackles this kind of seemingly minor issue involving differences in theology that are fairly insubstantial. And he says, well, listen, let me tell you about the purpose of the whole world.

[ 3 : 30 ] It's kind of like sometimes my wife and I have a fight sometimes. And this is the negative example of this. It will go like this. Babe, would you mind putting the cap back on the toothpaste?

Why are you always nagging me? You never loved me! It sort of goes boom, boom, boom. It just explodes. It escalates, right, really quick. So you have this minor issue and Paul just escalates it, but in a really positive way.

So he wants his church to be unified in Rome. And he wants them to support one another. And he wants them to welcome one another. But the last thing he wants is for him, for them just to hear him say, let's just be nice.

Because it's nice to be nice, and Christians are nice. No, he wants to see that underpinning his desire for them to be united in the gospel, underpinning that, are these cosmic principles governing his call here.

So let's see, how does he do that? How does he do that? Well, two ways. First, verses 8 to 11 there. You see those quotes there, if you slide your eyes over the passage there, 8 to 11.

[ 4 : 48 ] There's all these references to Gentiles being part of God's plan. And it's like Paul, he's saying to these Romans, he's saying, he's like grabbing their eyeballs and he's yanking them down onto the scripture.

And he's going, look, look, all the stuff I've been saying about welcoming people, all the stuff I've been saying about making space for the weak, all the stuff I'm saying about being unified and supporting each other, he's grabbing them and saying, this is what God's plan for the whole world has been all along.

It's not just like this thing sort of happened and I'm saying being nice to each other. My whole plan all along was I would create a people for myself. So the welcome and support Christians give each other is not just from the idea it's good to be good, it's nice to be nice.

No, it arises from something far more crucial, far more important. And it comes from the primary narrative, the basic Christian story, which Paul summarizes here. And the narrative is this, let me remind you of it again.

And God's plan from the beginning is that his kingdom will be made up of all nations, Jew and Gentile. And verse 6 says it very well. And together they would, with one voice, would glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 5 : 59 ] So this is why we welcome each other. And that's why the strong support the weak. Even if the weak are annoying and have wacky ideas, Paul says, come on, this is God's plan.

A whole lot of very different folks becoming his people and looking after each other. That's always been my plan. Now, the second way he drives this message of being unified and helping and supporting each other and being a real body is he doesn't just give them the back story.

He gives them the future story. And he talks about hope. And hope is a big word in this passage. It's mentioned a number of times. In fact, the final words is, Paul, this is the end of a sort of a theological chunk here.

And right at the end of that theological chunk, there is a prayer. Listen to the prayer. It's beautiful. 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.

Now, hope is such an interesting thing. I mean, it's so easy for us to hope in lots of different things, isn't it? We hope to have a good personal plan moving forward. We hope we'll get a good education.

[ 7 : 09 ] We hope for a good job. We hope we'd have a wide variety of interests. We hope we'd be and become the kind of people that people want to be friends with. We hope to achieve some level of financial security.

We hope to stay healthy. That's all great stuff. I hope you achieve these things. But the hope that you place in these things is a bit of a counterfeit for the kind of hope that God is talking about here. And I say it's a counterfeit, not because these things are bad, but they just, they can be about this thin.

And they can be taken away from us very quickly. But I hope in God, well, see, God's the only one who actually knows the future. This is the thing that real hope can be put in.

So the hope we've pointed to here in Romans is the hope that God is doing what he said he's going to do all through the Old Testament.

And this church, our church, and the local church up the street, all the churches around, this is evidence of that. That God is following through on what he promised to do. That he would build and gather a people for himself, a group of incompatible people coming together under Christ, welcoming each other, supporting each other.

[ 8 : 22 ] It proves that God is God and he's fulfilling his promises. And he will continue to do that until Christ's return, when we will experience that unity as God's people in its completest form.

And one of the wonderful things about hope is that it doesn't just make us dreamy and useless. Being hopeful people, hoping in this, hoping in Christ's return, hoping that God will continue to fulfill this promise.

And we'll see it completely fulfilled. It doesn't mean that, you know, having this hope doesn't mean we sit around with silly smiles in our faces and we tell ourselves, well, we don't need to do anything because, you know, it's just going to sort of happen.

God will sort it all out. Now, Paul has been reminding us here that we set our hearts on God's future hope and we work towards it now.

See, what hope does is it doesn't just give us nice feelings. Hope activates our hearts. It activates us. It pushes us towards action.

[ 9 : 31 ] And the example Paul gives us at the beginning, let's sacrifice for one another. Let's accommodate for the weak. That's hope in action. What does hope look like?

It's not a nice feeling. It's not a concept. Hope looks like action. Hope looks like us supporting each other. Hope looks like us being the body of Christ.

Christ. This is why, and that's not easy stuff, right? All that stuff I'm saying sounds nice. It's not very easy, though. That's one of the reasons Romans is actually a very difficult book to read, because we want our lives to be about ourselves.

But Paul, in this passage, and Paul throughout Romans, is continually and constantly pushing us out of the center of our own story, which is just awkward, right? And it's what hope does.

Hope pulls us out of our own self-absorption. And it's why the prayer of verse 13 is the prayer it is, that the power of the Holy Spirit may abound.

[ 10 : 35 ] Because we need the power of the Holy Spirit to not make our lives just about ourselves. So, there's this little domestic issue in this church in Rome, where there are these non-substantive theological differences, and they are causing problems.

And Paul says to them, don't fight for your own way here, folks. He says, no, the Christian asks, what will build up my neighbor? And that is tough.

Leonard Bernstein, famous director, he said, someone asked them, what's the hardest instrument to play? And he said, without pause, second fiddle. And he said that, but without the second fiddle, there is no harmony.

And Paul here is calling us to play second fiddle to others, isn't he? And I think the bottom line of this call is this, is that, you know, there is no way for us to be a family, to be the people of God, to have unity without self-sacrifice.

And where does that self-sacrifice come? It springs out of the great hope that we have that God is renewing his world and his church, and he is inviting us into that process through serving and supporting each other.

[ 11 : 55 ] So, that is the second Advent practice. First, put on Christ. The second, hope in him. And won't just give you a warm feeling. It will change you.

Now, let me pray these words of Paul to finish this. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And 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.

Amen. Amen. Amen.