

Romans 15:4-13

4 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.** 5 May the God who gives **endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity** among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may **glorify the God** and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.** 8 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 9 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."

10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."

12 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."

**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.**

INTRO - Do you see what I have here? It is a manger scene. We bought this in Jerusalem. Jamie liked the patterns in the wood. My wife liked the pieces.

You've seen manger scenes before. This shows a stable with a mother dad and baby Jesus. The shepherds and the wise men are looking on. In addition to the humans, the animals and an angel look on. We've seen this so much that it has taken on a dream like quality. It speaks to us of hope, and peace and joy - of Christmas.

I. So, is there really hope and peace and joy, and love, because of that manger scene? Because Jesus came to this world?

A. After all, our lesson for today talks of such a life for God's people.

1. We hear of God's gift of hope. **4 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.** We know God has something better coming! Hope!

2. We hear of Christian love. Verse 7 says, **Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.** When we treat others as Jesus treated us, that is love.

3. We hear of peace and joy and faith in verse 13. **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 a wonderful gift!

B. So, does this idyllic, pastoral, manger *event* bring peace and hope and joy, does it bring love into our world?

C. Well, the answer is yes, and no, and yes.

II. Let me tell you the yes, first.

A. Last week we said a prayer of thanks for Melanie Kopperud's dad, a Lutheran

minister, who had passed away at 92. He was a man who knew his Lord, who loved his family, who lived a full life, and after eating lunch died in his sleep.

1. Melanie's dad died believing Jesus is his Savior, and by the grace of God he is with the Lord, in heaven, where the victory of Jesus rules, where we are told there is no more pain, no more crying, no more mourning, no more death.

2. In other words, in the presence of Jesus there is hope and peace and joy and love. They are real.

B. Yes, because of that manger scene, and because of Calvary and the cross, there really is hope and peace and joy and love for God's people in heaven. That is real.

III. But, in another way, the answer seems to be no.

A. Last Sunday I got home from the Voters' meeting, a meeting of faith and unity, for which I am thankful by the way, and I got a phone call. One of our oldest members is Harriet Hanson. Harriet lives in the Pioneer home. She once cut Pastor Allen's Aunt's hair in Detroit, back in the 1940's. Harriet and her daughter Lenny, and Lenny's fiancée were at our anniversary celebration. We have a picture of them. My phone call was that Lenny had been attacked by her fiancée's son. You read about it in the paper. Lenny's fiancée is dead. Lenny is in the hospital. Others are dead and injured too. I went to the Hospital.

B. But, that wasn't all this week.

1. You read later this week about the young man in Omaha who opened fire on people Christmas shopping in a mall, killing 8, wounding 5, and then himself.

2. Yesterday I found out our janitor, Monty Hart, ended up in the hospital.

C. That doesn't sound like an idyllic setting for God's people, does it?

1. That doesn't sound like peace and hope and joy and love.

2. It sounds like, and it is, pain, and grief, and sin, and evil.

3. That baby who was born in that manger may have been God's son. But, this world is not heaven. This world still has the results of sin.

4. We know that pain. We know that struggle with sin. We know death!

D. So, in a way, the answer about that manger bringing a world of peace and joy and love, might seem to be no. At least, today that is not all we see. We still see sin.

IV. But, let me tell you again, that the answer is yes.

A. Our world may be suffering from the violence of the past week, but yesterday, it all stopped, sort of. My wife says our little celebration in our little town is like a Norman Rockwell painting. And do you know what it is called, Colony CHRISTmas! People know that Jesus makes a difference, and they celebrate the joy of the season with a Fair, and a parade, and fireworks. It may not be a specifically religious or Christian celebration. But, if we want to be honest, in the end, the celebration talks about and reflects the joy Jesus brings to a world of pain.

1. You see, Jesus came not just to the church, but a whole world of sin, offering to bring forgiveness.

2. Jesus came to a world of pain, and brought joy in the hope of eternal life.

3. Jesus came to a world of despair, and brought hope, because He wasn't just born, he died and rose to save the world.

B. Our world may be a world of violence and suffering, but last night I saw peace and joy and love. The Alaska children's Choir sang beautiful music about the season. Do

you know what the music was about? It was about the joy of Christmas, because of Jesus. In this life, there is pain, but the truth of Jesus' victory is breaking in. For those who believe, there is not only joy in heaven, but joy in the midst of this world's pain. C. Our world may be a world of pain and death and suffering because of sin, but as I visited Harriet's daughter this week, 5 times, every time I saw another friend or family member, all Christians, there at her bed bringing love. Yes the pain happened, but the love of Jesus was on display with faith, and kindness, and help.

CONCLUSION - Before I knew of the events of this week, looking at the Gospel which calls for repentance, and the epistle which talks of a life of hope and faith and love, I entitled this sermon, 'What does repentance look like?'

Many think of repentance as something harsh. But, repentance is knowing Jesus, his forgiveness, his saving, life changing love. Repentance is a changed life. Hope and Joy and love may be perfect in heaven, but they are breaking into this world because of Jesus' birth, and death, and resurrection, through His people. Your challenge and call today is to share this with the world around you. When God's believe believe in Jesus, when you know his love and salvation, when you show faith, and hope, and joy, and love, you are not only showing what repentance looks like, you are showing that the birth of the Savior that first Christmas, and his next coming make a difference.