

Romans 15.4 “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.’

The Epistle for Advent 2 is concerned with hope. The word occurs three times in the section; once in the opening verse and twice in the closing verse. Hope is that in which the whole scripture is framed. It keeps it together. But what is hope? It is the supreme confidence which arises from trust in Christ that in no circumstances will the Christian be ashamed of whom he trusts. That is what gives life poise, purpose and meaning to each of us.

But how is hope obtained? For us by the means of the scriptures. As we know they were written for our learning. The point was not simply the provision of a record of events, even sacred ones, but that we might be taught what this hope is, so that we may live. Where there is hope there is life, and this hope is derived from God himself who is the source of unending hope. We proclaim that he is “the God of hope.” It rests upon God’s declared mind and will, and upon his unending faithfulness. God by his Spirit can cause us to “abound in hope.”

So God gives us hope through his word. He communicates his intention, and makes known to us all what he has in mind to do. For through it, we are given “learning” or instructions in the ways of God. By its help we can understand the end which God has in view, and how we might share in that.

God also sustains us through his word. Because the fulfillment of hope lies in the future we have to learn to be patient, and as we know that is part of the message of this great season of Advent. We need not only patience but persistence. As today’s Collect reminds us we should not only “embrace”, but also “ever hold fast” our blessed God given hope. God’s word has been provided for our “comfort” or “encouragement”, to keep us holding fast to

our hope, when present circumstances might tend to prompt despair, as we look around and see the results of man's greed and inhumanity to his fellow man.

So God shows himself to be not only "the God of hope", but also "the God of patience and comfort". He not only creates hope by his word; but also by his word he keeps hope alive.

Patience is also needed to learn a new language. This does not mean Hebrew or Greek, but words like faith and peace, yes, and hope too. In the scriptures their meaning is not exactly what it is in the newspapers. We must not forget that the Bible is a classic. No-one understands a classic, be it a symphony, a novel, a picture 'at one go'. Patience is needed and reflection and study often too.

That is what scriptures do. They come along side. They reflect all my fears, angers, temptations and sins, but also my hope deep down inside my being, that man cannot simply be a creature with less life than a tree. We must 'read, mark, learn and inwardly digest' them'. Then hope is aroused in the human heart, and with hope, life of a different quality. We also learn from today's Epistle that by his word God gives life to all men. God's word in Christ promises salvation to all alike. This is the particular truth Paul is aiming at today. By a series of quotations from the Old Testament he makes plain, that before Christ came, God not only gave great promises to the Jews; but also that he promised in the day of fulfillment the Gentiles, too, would "glorify God for his mercy", and rejoice in giving God praise. And, my dear people, such we do this morning inheritors as we all are of that same hope. Paul also reminds in Romans 10. 12 "For whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

We learn too today that makes this hope ours when we believe. The apostle's concern, and his prayer were that his readers should be full to overflowing with this kind of hope- the

hope of full salvation in Christ. Be we need to be aware that this can happen only by God's doing. He must fill us with hope. Nor will such hope abound until we have found peace and joy, satisfaction and delight in counting on God's faithfulness to each and every one of us.

It is in order to bring this to pass – to inform and inspire our faith, and then our hope – that the scriptures have been written. So for no matter what the issue may be, if we have God's word for it, then we have every reason to find “all joy and peace in believing”, and to “abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost”.

During this second week of Advent, may God grant you experience, that through patience, the comfort of Scriptures may you live and die in sure and certain hope.

Amen