

Lord Jesus Christ, fill our hearts with such joy and confidence in connection with Your Day and the signs which You have given us as heralds of Your coming, that we *readily* raise our heads as those who await You, knowing that Your coming betokens our final entrance into the blessed abode which You have prepared for those who love You, for Your Name's sake. Amen. (Luther for the Busy Man, ed. P. D. Pahl, p. 19, 20)

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. 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. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name." And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol Him." And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even He who arises to rule the Gentiles; in Him will the Gentiles hope." 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.

In Christ Jesus, by whose resurrection we have been born again to a living hope, dear fellow redeemed:

What are you waiting for these days? – a marriage? - birth of a child, grandchild? – family gatherings during the holidays? – graduation? – new employment? We all go through life anticipating various events, but they all have their share of concerns associated with them. We often worry because we have experienced enough disappointments in life that we have learned not to become too hopeful. But when it comes to the future for a believer in Christ, we have a source, which assuredly gives us comfort and peace: **God's Word Causes Us to Await in All Hopefulness.**

I

This confident waiting, however, is not found in ourselves. It is not found in our superior status over others. It is not due to our proficient ability to draw reasonable conclusions, which brings us hope in a world that seems so hopeless. It is the operation of the Holy Spirit alone through His living and eternal Word. As 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."

It was a common error of the Jews in Jesus' and Paul's day to think they had reason to hope in their lineage from Abraham while Gentiles were often thought to be inferior and even left out of the hope of eternal life offered by God. So the Apostle goes on to list several Old Testament passages verifying the truth of God's way of salvation was always intended for all people, not just Israelites. Isaiah wrote: "The root of Jesse will come, even He who arises to rule the Gentiles; in Him will the Gentiles hope."

Those Old Testament believers: Adam/Eve, Abraham/Sarah, David/Bathsheba, Boaz/Ruth; the New Testament believers: Zechariah/Elizabeth, Joseph/Mary had confident hope in the Christ promised to them and understood by faith that this was not based on who they were over against other less "fortunate" sinners. They saw themselves as sinners deserving everlasting punishment, but by God's grace they were given faith in the One who was coming to take their place who would win and secure everlasting life for them. They were encouraged in this broken world, just as we are today.

God's Word was living and active among them not only creating, but sustaining faith in their hearts. They remained sinners throughout their lives here, but were not discouraged. Yes, they repented and realistically confessed their sins, but trusted that God had a plan to overcome their sin and wretchedness through the One He was sending for us all.

We have recently reviewed our Lutheran heritage marking the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. The same Word that was active in the Old and New Testament continues to give hope, since it was written for all generations to come. This gave hope to sinners declared holy in Christ like: Martin/Katie, Bjug/Guro. But even in more recent times saints and sinners like: Adolph/Martha, Alice/Elmer, Ranghild/Iver, Ilse/Monte, Albert/Carol, Rick/Gwen, George/Esther, Allert/Ellen, Dick/Lydia, Stan/Thelma, Hugo/Harriet, Dean/Hazel, Don/Genevieve, Max/Mary, Herb/Velzora ... and there are many others who could be mentioned.¹ By God's grace you and I are also among those who confess ourselves to be sinners who have the certain hope of everlasting life in Christ based on the Word of God.

II

¹ These married couples were members of Parkland Lutheran Church and were buried by Pastor Obenberger over the past 29 years.

However, we need to understand that this is not some cognitive exercise on our part, drawing logical conclusions from the Word. The Gospel is foolishness to the logical sinful mind and it is an offense to the self-righteous sinner. The Word of God is able to bestow this great gift because it is the power of God unto salvation. The Spirit works through that Word and implants in us the faith, which trusts that God loves us, despite our wretched sinfulness. It has the power to give us joy and peace when everything around us and even in us is broken and hopeless.

This after all is the prayerful desire of the Apostle for his Roman readers and for all who read these life-giving words to the very end of the age. Paul writes: 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 power of God has very profound impacts upon the lives of believers, because as Paul also says: ... the God of endurance and encouragement grants 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. You and I have been united in this holy Christian Church, which is found throughout the world made up of Jews and Gentiles alike. Discord arises when we look to compete with one another - compete for the approval of God as though we will be rewarded over against the other. Why should we seek such evil things, when we not only have the knowledge but the actual faith that God has justified all the wicked including ourselves, not holding our sins against us, but having assigned them all to His Son in our place?

The devil, the unbelieving world and our own sinful flesh love to entice us to fight against our brothers and sisters in the flesh and tempt us with pride, envy, jealousy, greed in an effort to serve self. But our Lord has called us out of such lives of hopelessness. We now await in this broken world, our broken lives, broken relationships with great hopefulness the coming of our Lord to rescue us from this place, from ourselves in this world and take us to be home with Him forever.

But meanwhile we await in all hopefulness with this very same word of Christ every day receiving forgiveness, receiving life, receiving salvation exactly right where we live, move and have our being. What was begun already with Adam and Eve continues to our day, since again "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." Jesus, our

one and only Savior is the same yesterday, today and forever. Be patient with our Lord as He works upon you through His powerful Word of grace, not only spoken to you personally, but given to you intimately in the Sacraments.

If you have been looking at God's word as an exercise of merely gaining knowledge, you have been missing the way it really works upon you. It actually gives to you the very thing that it declares to you, e.g. when you hear from God your sins are all forgiven, your sins **ARE** forgiven. God's living and abiding Word sustains you, granting you the certain hope found alone in His promises unto life everlasting. With your Lord's life-giving Word active in your lives, everlasting joy and peace truly fill you as you now await your Lord's return in glory. Amen.