06.14.26 ~ Pentecost 3
"Hope in the Book of Romans"
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Comfort Pew Bible 443

Job 14:7-9 CSB

7 There is hope for a tree:
If it is cut down, it will sprout again,
and its shoots will not die.
8 If its roots grow old in the ground
and its stump starts to die in the soil,
9 the scent of water makes it thrive
and produce twigs like a sapling.

Leader: These Are Words of Assurance!
People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

Romans 2:6-11, 28-29 CEV Pew Bible 978

6 God will reward each of us for what we have done. 7 He will give eternal life to everyone who has patiently done what is good in the hope of receiving glory, honor, and life that lasts forever. 8 But he will show how angry and furious he can be with every selfish person who rejects the truth and wants to do evil. 9 All who are wicked will be punished with trouble and suffering. It doesn't matter if they are Jews or Gentiles. 10 But all who do right will be rewarded with glory, honor, and peace, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. 11 God doesn't have any favorites!

28 Just because you live like a Jew and are circumcised doesn't make you a real Jew. 29 To be a real Jew you must obey the Law. True circumcision is something that happens deep in your heart, not something done to your body. And besides, you should want praise from God and not from humans.

Leader: These Are Apostle Paul's Words to Guide Us!
People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Oh Lord, we worship and adore you, yet also sometimes fear your judgment. Help us to balance our fear with faith, love, and assurance. Thank you for the insights and wrestling with your word that Job and Apostle Paul exhibit in your Scriptures. We are grafted in to the family of God and Christ by our baptism and Christ's salvation. Help us to understand that better. We are assured since we learned about natural grafted branches on tree trunks last week, how they take hold and bear fruit, sometimes with a better fruit or blossom than before. We feel your strength knowing our divine roots will seek water to continue to grow the tree and its branches. We love you, Lord, and long to be in your presence. Help us to open our minds and hearts to trust what we do not understand. Please speak through these Scriptures, this message, and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Last week we learned in Romans 11 about grafting, both the natural and spiritual forms of combining two trees or plants to produce the best of both. We discussed the apostle Paul's explanation of how the Gentile believers are grafted to the roots of the Jewish faith, those who supported, rejected, and then crucified Jesus. It was indeed a complicated yet sanctifying situation that baffled believers of early Christian history. Well, as challenging as the spiritual explanation was, it inspired me to keep going. I suggested that you do a Romans book study to learn more but decided to lead you on one instead! So, yes, I have preached on the last chapters of Romans before, but never the earlier difficult verses on sin and judgment. To be honest, I was taught those passages through a negative tone and have always steered clear of them! However, as I walked you through the grafting illustrations, I felt inspired to see Romans through a new positive lens or lenses, through new voices and lenses of hope, instruction, opportunity, evangelism, mission, joy, and being grafted through Abraham into Christ! So, I hope you'll travel this road with me this summer as we walk slowly along the Romans Road together, learning a new perspective about righteousness and sin.

But first let us continue our tree metaphor in the passage from Job. In it we find another natural and spiritual image of growth and sustenance. Job's book of poetry and prose about the human condition, his relationship with God, and theology is considered part of Biblical wisdom literature, like Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. The dates of Job are not conclusive and can be anywhere from the 10th to 2nd Centuries BCE. The prologue (1:2-2:13) pictures Job in his

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original happiness and details his calamities; the epilogue (42:7-17) depicts Job's restoration and final satisfaction. The bulk of the poetic section is given over to the speeches of Job and his comforters (4:1-27:23).

Job, the man himself, is a non-Israelite who fears God, avoids evil and is blameless and upright. A satanic angel is allowed to test Job's faithfulness to God by turning his whole life upside down with calamity, illness, death of his family, untrue friendships, and chaos yet he sustains and maintains his faith in God's protection, provision, and trust. Like *The Tree Who Survived the Winter*, Job carries on and even grows into a new, stronger man because he is loved and he persevered.

In our particular passage, Job claims and argues his equality to his friends who have become his moral superiors. He argues his integrity before God, longing for the resurrection as he yearns for an afterlife, pressing his case of having lived a righteous life without sin. He begs to know, is resurrection possible? Does it resemble the parched tree searching for a riverbed or stream of underground water from which its roots might drink and grow? Much like a grafted branch onto the stem or trunk, Job yearns to be protected with tape, burlap, and soil to nourish his own growth, yet chooses water for his metaphor. Perhaps this could be a hint (in our 20/20 hindsight) of the living water of Jesus? Job does not yet know of Jesus, yet I saw the parallel with the non-Jew in Paul's metaphor. Job is searching for answers and strength to obey God and grow in his faith even in the middle of turmoil. How do we measure up to that righteousness? Would our roots stretch forth to find water and nourishment to grow in Christ? Or if we were in Job's position, would we

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shrink, give up on God's love, and give in to the punishment? Food for thought as we go back into Paul's letter to the Romans.

As difficult to read as Job is, he gives me hope for the future and for all life's difficulties. As does Paul, who even in his imprisonment and house arrest, he chooses to write to the churches that need to hear his words of teaching and encouragement! The opening of his letter offers his own testimony of credentials and defines good and evil, but mostly he states that everyone is guilty of sinning and should expect a harsh judgment from God. Yet he posits that God will bestow eternal life on those who by persistence in doing good keep on seeking glory, honor, and immortality. It almost sounds like works over grace, so at least one sermon concept we'll be studying over the summer is grace. Paul says that anger and wrath are what await the self-seeking individual. A person's habits reveal the internal condition of their character and their hearts. Perhaps those messages are why we fear studying Romans, because of our own guilty consciences of acts done or left undone! Humans demonstrate by their actions whether they believe in Jesus' teachings and in him as the Messiah or not.

Paul also lays out his argument that one's heritage or lineage does not matter whether you are Jew or Greek/Gentile. This is the first time we hear that God plays no favorites! All who are wicked will be punished and all who are good will be rewarded, both Jews and Greeks. Matthew Henry, turn of the century scholar and commentator states: "it is not enough to know well, and speak well, and profess well, and promise well, but we must do well: do that which is good, not only for the matter of it,

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but for the manner of it . . . [*and exhibit*] a patient continuance." Such a person will receive mercy and forgiveness.

In the rest of the verses leading up to 28 and 29, Paul debates the law of circumcision versus general faith. Jesus was himself circumcised because it was their tradition to uphold the law, but he only spoke of it in John 7:22-23 about Moses requiring circumcision. Other teachings, specifically the two commandments to love God and neighbor are contradictory to Moses' law. Jesus came to fulfill the law, not require others to adhere to it. And we know that Jesus died for our sins on the cross and if we believe in him and the triune God, we need not follow humankind's laws of Leviticus. Those 635 laws are worthless in the heart of Christ! Yet we are grafted onto Abraham's lineage, so there is a respect for the Jews if not agreement with them. True circumcision for Paul is one of the heart: to cut out the evil portions that make us do what we are ashamed of doing. More on that later, as we walk the Romans road together.

Last week we focused on Jeremiah's thirsty shrub in the desert, who sought out the nourishment of God who watered it, much like Job's comments. Today, **we stretch our roots in Abraham to reach the living water of Jesus and to renew ourselves in that Living Water!** That, my friends, is the **Hope** of the Book of Romans, or Paul's letter to the Romans. He was a Jewish Pharisee who committed evil acts against Christ followers, yet by the supernatural experience on the Damascus Road, Paul became Jesus' apostle, creating the Christian church all over Asia. He was not only forgiven but empowered to learn and teach Jesus'

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Good News of Resurrection and eternal life. Hallelujah! He is still risen!

Amen? Amen! ||

***<u>Please pray with me</u>*:** We praise you Jesus as we read your word today, trying to understand these concepts. We trust that you will enlighten us and educate us over the summer, so that we may be good examples and evangelists to others. We thank you for your presence in our fellowship today. Accept our gratitude for the grafting. Help us to act with goodness and glorify you in all we do, think, or say. Deepen our faith and strengthen our resolve to follow your teachings, inviting others to love you as we do. May our lives be acceptable to you. Please bless us as we go, remembering your resurrection and promise. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

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