

Romans Series

Abound in Hope

Romans 15:13a

Sermon Transcripts by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We were in Italy when we heard that even American tourists had to have visas if they were going to return back through France. Of course that was because of the terrorist bombing in Paris. So we all went to the French embassy in Florence and I had my Polaroid camera and I took pictures of everybody for our visas. Then we handed them our 4300 Lira which is of course just three dollars and agreed that we would come back at 4 p.m. to collect our passports.

At 4 O' clock, up there in that little corridor in the French embassy, you faced the sheer chaos and anarchy that our world has now come into. Because there you had one little Italian in the uniform trying to call out these American names and I think I was 'Ernesto O'Neal' and I think Colleen was 'Colleeno Donahuae.' There were a hoard of us in the corridor, and as he called out names, we just put up our hands and any terrorist could have had as many American passports as he wanted.

It just came home to you again that really we're doing our best but we can't actually do very much about the international anarchy and chaos. I don't know if you realize it but there is a guy that was actually interviewed by a British newspaper, who in Amsterdam, sells stolen American passport appropriately personalized to any terrorist for a couple of thousand dollars.

You just begin to realize that we're doing all we can but really, we haven't a chance of doing anything to bring the chaos and the anarchy under control. When you see things like Chernobyl or you see events like the AIDS time bomb, that is just still waiting to explode, you begin to realize that it's getting outside our control, that this world situation that we're facing today is something that we're just making gestures at. We're just making stabs at it but actually we have no sure, confident way of protecting ourselves or defending ourselves.

It is interesting all of us here this morning that are more than 15 years of age and remember a world that we could control, we keep on irrationally hoping that it will get better. We just can't believe that we're facing something that will not get better.

But it's interesting those under 15, the kids in our schools, have no such illusions and that's partially why the biggest killer among our school kids is suicide. They can't articulate the meaninglessness of life or the purposelessness of it. They can't really articulate the uncertainty that they see in their parent's attitude towards each other. And they can't actually blot it out with cocaine, the way Hollywood does, but they can remove it by removing themselves from it.

Loved ones, more and more, that is the kind of feeling that is pervading many of our attitudes towards the world today. It's really what one of the French existentialist [Manoe] said on radio about 20 years ago. He said, "If there is no hope, then we have no hope." That's really what a lot of us are feeling.

The statesmen make their attempts at doing something but they know fine well, there is really no way

to protect any of us from the kind of chaotic, anarchic, international terrorism that we now face. You know fine well, we blasted right at Gaddafi because we reckoned, you better hit him early, maybe it'll kind of discourage him but we don't really feel it will finally discourage him. We know that somebody sooner or later will get hold of some bomb that we cannot control.

In a sense, therefore, we are living in a different world from when we went off to war in 1418, or even when we went off to war 3945, we're living in a world now where there is less feeling of hope than ever before. Hope, in the sense of human hope. Less and less do we see any hope for things humanly.

Human hope is based on the way things look as if they're going to turn out. It's the kind of hope that actually was mentioned in that New Testament lesson that Gentry read. Maybe you'd look at it. It's Luke 24:21, and the two men you remember are talking about their leader.

Luke 24:21, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened". In other words, they were saying, "Our leader was tried and executed and he was supposed to rise on the third day but we see no signs of him rising."

In other words, human hope is based on looking at the outward circumstances and events remembering how those events have turned out in past experiences that we've had and then calculating on the basis of that, how we think things are going to turn out in the future.

That's human hope. Of course, on the basis of human hope, those of us who see how the world war started and see how things are developing today, we calculate with absolute certainty that the whole thing will blow into bits in a matter of a few years. Because human hope depends on what we see with our eyes. It is a matter of observing what we see around us and calculating what we think is going to happen. That's the way most of us use the word hope.

If you think of the way you use the word 'hope', you know that's what you say. You say, "Oh well I hope I'll be able to do that. I hope I'll be able to go on vacation." You look at the way your job commitments are, you look at the way your money is in the bank and you calculate, "Well I hope I'll be able to do that".

We actually use the word 'hopefully' or misuse the adverb 'hopefully' in the same way. When we say 'hopefully', we don't really mean we're thinking hopefully or even we're speaking hopefully, we mean we hope this is going to happen. We expect this will happen in the light of what we've observed around us.

In that sense, fewer and fewer of us see any hope for our international situation and of course, fewer and fewer of us even in our own lives see any hope for our lives. I don't know what you think of the thing like AIDS, but it is mind-boggling, isn't it? It is hideous. Do you know what's going to happen? They're talking about the fact that we've seen the tip of the iceberg?

It's hideous to think what is going to happen and then when you realize that there are things like legionnaire's disease and other things that we actually haven't solved. You begin to realize even the inhumanity of man-to-man and the lack of concern that we now have, the more of us that gather in large cities and the lack of care for each other, and then you begin to see the way the kids are going in the schools.

It's very easy, isn't it, to come to the place where you say on the basis of human hope. There is really very little to hope for. I would submit to you that that's why some of us even have more trouble with depression in these days about our own personal lives, because when we say we hope for something, we mean we're expecting it to happen in the light of the circumstances in our lives at present and fewer and fewer of us see hopeful circumstances developing in our lives.

So, it's amazing how many of us are caught in depression. It would surprise you how many of us operate on uppers and downers [pills] as a normal part of our life. It would surprise us how many of us depend on pills just to keep going day-by-day. And on the basis of human hope, loved ones, that's about all you can expect. That was the kind of hope that Abraham had when God promised him that he and Sarah would have a son, even though they were almost 100 years of age, He promised him that, and you remember how the record goes, if you like to look at it in Romans 4:19.

Romans 4:19, "Abraham did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about 100 years old or when he considered the barrenness of Sara's womb." In other words, when he looked at his own body, which was as good as dead and when he saw Sara's womb, a woman of over 80 or 90 years of age, he saw that from a human point of view there was no likelihood that they would have a child, then how did they end up with a son called Isaac? Well, you'll see it there in the verse before.

Romans 4:18, "In hope he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations as he had been told, so shall your descendants be". In hope, he believed against hope because there's another kind of hope. That's it. There's another hope besides human hope. Human hope is based on what the circumstances seem to indicate in the light of your past experience of similar circumstances. Human hope is based on what you see with your eyes and what you hear with your ears.

There is another kind of hope and it was in that hope that Abraham hoped. He hoped against his human hope. He looked at Sara's womb. He looked at his own body as good as dead and yet against that human hope, he hoped with a different kind of hope. What kind of hope is that?

Well, loved ones, you'll see it there if you look at it in Romans 4:17. It's a hope that is based on different facts than those of the world and you might say, "Well, what facts are better than those in the world?" Well, these, in verse 17.

Romans 4:17, "In the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." This hope is based on a different set of facts. It's based not on the facts of your present situation at home or your present situation in your finances, or your present situation with your friends, it's based on other facts entirely.

It's based on the facts of God himself and his reality. He is the one that called things into existence out of nothing. He is the one that can change things. He is the one that can make things where there is nothing. Divine hope is based on the reality of God himself and his own action and it was in that hope that Abraham began to believe. That's the meaning of hope that transforms the things in our life today. That hope has a different kind of basis. It's in Romans 4:21. This is the basis of that kind of divine hope.

Romans 4:21, "Fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." That's divine hope, "Fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised", and it's not based on seeing. Human hope is based on what you see with your eyes but this kind of hope is based as it says in verse 18,

"In hope, he believed against hope." It's based on believing. It's based not on seeing but it's based on believing, on believing that God is still in existence and that he is able to do something about our present situation. That's why this verse that we're studying today in Romans is so real. It's Romans 15:13.

Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope." Our God is a God of hope. He is the God of hope and he has fully intended you and me even in the midst of this nightmare in which we live, to actually abound in hope. That's his intention.

His intention is not that we wring our hands over AIDS. His intention is not that we lie awake at night worrying about the finances. His intention is not that we worry ourselves sick about what is going to happen in the international situation. His intention is that we would abound in hope.

If you say, "Why? Why can he himself have any hope when he looks at this headiest world? How can all the strain and the agony and the futility of this world allow him to have any hope?" Would you believe it? That's the very heart of his hope. That's the very basis for his hope. The futility and the strain of humanity in these days, is the very basis of God's hope. I'll show you why. It's in Romans 8:20.

Romans 8:20, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope, because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, grown inwardly, as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees, but if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

God has subjected the creation to this futility in hope. What does it mean? If there were no AIDS, we would never know that what we call love is not love. We would live in a world filled with promiscuity, filled with adultery and fornication, filled with lust, filled with our own desires. We would never know any better if God had not built into the whole system, a dreadful disease like AIDS, not that he causes it but he has built-in certain consequences of our actions to let us know that there's something wrong with the whole world. There is something wrong in our attitudes to each other. If terrorism did not exist, we would continue in our own self-will forever, never knowing that we were trying to be our own gods.

It is God himself who has subjected the creation to these futilities, who has built-in certain natural consequences of our actions that act as signposts, that stand up and say, "You're going the wrong way. You're going the wrong way. There is a God who loves you and cares for you himself."

In other words, the Father looks at the strain and the agony of our present international situation and sees that as the very basis for hope that we men and women will begin to realize that we're not trusting the dear Creator that made us, that we're not submitting ourselves to his will, that we're not respecting and acknowledging him. There is hope in the midst of this situation that men and women will begin to question the way they're going.

Loved ones, it's far worse to go like lemmings over a cliff, not knowing that you're going over it until you're dead. That's far worse than to be facing the futilities and the strains that God has

built into our present world -- not that he has caused them, not that he has caused venereal disease, not that he has caused the terrorism -- but he has built it into the consequences of our actions so that we will have hope of seeing that we are not living in any kind of relationship to the dear Creator that has made us, but we are living in a wild, desolate, lonely world that is not his intention for us at all.

You see, he subjected it in hope, not that we would just sometime after death, be set free from these things. But he subjected in a hope so that we would be freed from these wild spirits of anarchy and terror that rule our world, so that we would begin to be freed from the fear of these epidemics and these diseases, so that we will begin to be freed from our dreadful anxiety neurosis. How can we be freed from those? By a great fact that has occurred in our universe and you find it there in Galatians 6:14.

Galatians 6:14, "But far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." God foresaw how little ones in Cologne and in Hamburg and in London and in Paris, would lie under the stairs at night trembling as the bombs fell on their house. [World War II] God foresaw how many of us in these days would begin to be bewildered and fearful when we looked at what was happening internationally. God foresaw how many of us would fall into anxiety neurosis because of the weight and the burden of our ordinary everyday lives and he took those powers because those are actual spiritual powers that impinge upon you.

So often we think, "Oh no, they're just rational". You know they're utterly irrational because in a given situation a few hours later, they're lifted off you completely. God saw that those spiritual powers would impinge upon us and he put them into his Son Jesus and in a death that was actually cosmic, because the temporal death of Jesus on the Cross is only an expression of a cosmic death that God executed in his Son. And in that death, God destroyed the power of those spiritual forces to send you into chaos and fear. It is possible, loved ones, if you believe that, because that's why the verse says, "May the God of hope give you all joy and peace in believing", if you believe that, you can live in the midst of this chaotic world, free from the effects of those powers in your own heart and life. So that you will not live under their domination or under their fear. You will not die before it is God's time to receive you.

In other words, the Father in his Son Jesus has destroyed the power of those forces to destroy you or me. That's why the woman and the children went into the lion arenas with such peace in their faces. They knew that no lion would kill them. The Father might designate to take them at a certain moment, but no lion would kill them because he had already shown them that Daniel could not be destroyed even in the fiery furnace. He had already shown them that the Israelites again and again were delivered from powers that were overwhelming -- that a little David could destroy a massive giant Goliath -- because those forces had been destroyed in Jesus' death from before the foundation of the world.

That is the hope that God intends us to live in. It is not a hope that is based on the way things look but a hope that is based on what he has done in his Son Jesus to destroy the powers of those things to affect us in anyway. Loved ones, we need to come right back to home -- how are you living yourself these days? How are you living? By what hope are you living? Are you living by human hope? I feel for you because I think some of you are and I know what it has been like in my own life to live that way.

You know, where you kept watching the way your life's going, you know the way it goes? You keep

watching the way your life's going. You keep watching the way things are falling out. You keep watching the way your job's going. You keep watching the way your money is going. You keep watching the way your marriage is going or the way your hope of marriage is going. You keep watching the way your life is draining away as the years pass. You know that? You keep watching. I feel for you. I can cry for you because I think many of us live in that situation. You keep looking getting the old binoculars out to see the future. We torture ourselves. We do. We just torture ourselves.

It's like some unseen hand fascinates us and mesmerizes us with those things. So we keep looking at these so called facts of our lives and you know the effect, I mean at times it's just a drain to get up. It's a miracle to get up some mornings and go through the next day. Loved ones, there is no human hope. There isn't. There is no human hope.

Let me tell you -- it's nothing very deep but it's the deepest things, one of the deepest truths we have -- you're going to die. You're going to die. After you've taken all the vitamins and after you've slogged yourself around those running tracks for miles, you're finally going to die. It's funny but after 16 or 13 maybe it's all downhill, isn't it? More cells are dying than there have been created.

Stop that. Stop that human hope thing. Stop torturing yourself with human hope. There is no human hope. Stop getting worried and ringing your hands in despair over the terrible things that are happening in the world. Stop letting fear grip you when you read something new in the newspaper. Stop that. There is no human hope. It is all going to end up in disaster. It just is. The Bible has told us that.

Just stop human hope, stop it and switch to divine hope. Switch to believing that the Lord God did really what he says he has done, that he has crucified the world, the whole complex system of world events and will powers and will forces, he has destroyed it in his Son Jesus and he has destroyed its ability to effect you in anyway so that a thousand will fall to your left hand and a ten thousand at your right hand but it will not come now you.

Start exercising divine hope. Start today after service. Stop the business of thinking what's going to happen this afternoon and how on earth are you going to make it reasonably happy or satisfying or how you're going to avoid doing the thing you don't want to do. Stop that and think at this moment, "Lord God, you knew the way things would go this afternoon and you foresaw it and whatever unpleasant things are set to affect me this afternoon, you have put into Jesus, your Son, and I do not explain it and I cannot explain it, but you have destroyed their power to take away from your life and peace. I thank you for that Lord." And go into this afternoon trusting in your Father. Trusting that he has a good afternoon for you and when things happen that you don't think are so good, trust him. "Lord, you want only good for me and so I know that there's good in this for me." When a bad thing happens, see that the Father is using that to do something in you to bring you closer to himself than you have been in the past.

In other words, throw away human hope. You can't get anywhere. You can't buoy up your feelings with human hope. Forget it. And begin to believe God. Do you know that your Father who made you, loves you more than your own dad? Do you know that? He loves you more than your own dad and more than your own mom, and you know fine well that when they thought of this afternoon for you, they did everything they could to make it a good afternoon for you. They did. And when they thought of next week, they did everything to make it a happy time for you. That's what your Father is doing. He, at this moment, in his great infinite mind, is working out how to make these next hours good for you

and he has the power to do it.

Loved ones, "may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may begin to abound in hope." We are meant to be the most 'filled with hope' people that have ever walked on this earth and that's God's will for you. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we know that you ensure that the planets do not collide. We know Lord that you supervise all the intricate movements of protons and neutrons. We know Father that you keep the blood in every human being on the earth circulating. Father, we know these things. Yet Lord, we have somehow thought that you did not do this with our own individual lives. Father, we ask forgiveness for thinking of you as some great managing director who only looks after the big things. Father, we see that you look after us. If you have numbered every hair of our heads, and we see our Father that you have a way for us. You have a way through for us.

We see, Lord, that in Jesus' death, you destroyed all the things that would destroy us. Father, thank you. Thank you, Lord, that we don't need to mesmerize ourselves any longer or torture ourselves any longer with the fears of what else is going to happen in our homes next week, or the fears of what is going to happen in our jobs or the fears of what is going to happen in the international situation.

Father, we thank you that we can commit all that into the mighty death that you worked in Christ and that we can be confident and fully expect with absolute certainty that none of those things are able to destroy us or take us out of your hands. And we expect that nothing will happen to us unless it is permitted by the Father who has the most loving heart of all, the one who has even died for us. Father we thank you for that.

We now, Lord, turn away from all the frustration of human hope and we turn now to you and we begin to exercise good hopes, good hopes for our lives, bright hopes full of expectations of things that are good and well and fulfilling. Father, we thank you that is because of Jesus that we are able to do this.

Now, dear Father, we would ask that you, the God of hope, would fill each one of us here this morning with all peace and joy and believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we might abound in hope.

The grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and evermore. Amen.