

## The God of Hope – Advent 2 2014

Isaiah 11 vv 1-10 p696, Psalm 72, Romans 15 vv 1-13 p114, Matthew 3 vv 1-12 p967

*Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. (Romans 15<sup>13</sup>).*

Those of you who read my daily bible notes will know from what I wrote for St Andrew's Day that I have always been somewhat puzzled by the meaning of the word *grace*. It isn't something you can bottle or weigh or measure. It isn't a feeling or an emotion. I wouldn't describe it as a force or energy, although energy perhaps gets close. Energy comes from the Greek for *work within*. Grace works in us. Grace works within us. Grace makes it possible for us to work. So perhaps grace is energy or force or power, but that still doesn't sound quite right. And yet we are always talking about grace. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*. I think I have a better idea of love and fellowship than I have of grace, which seems slightly paradoxical to me. Love and fellowship are associated with God and the Holy Ghost, the persons of the Trinity Who are hardest to understand and grace is associated with Jesus, my Brother, the One Who is supposed to reveal it all to us. Actually, if you read my notes for the 30<sup>th</sup> November, you will have seen that I now realise that there is a great deal more to love and fellowship than we can begin to comprehend. St Paul prays, *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3<sup>14-19</sup>)*. He exclaims, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out! Romans 11<sup>33</sup>*).

Be that as it may, one of our readers generously lent me a little book which has a great deal to say about grace. There was a whole chapter on Romans 15<sup>13</sup>, the last verse of today's epistle and my text for this sermon. *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost*. The author's point is that joy and peace are characteristics of the believer. A Christian is someone who is full of joy and peace. And yet, he says, this often seems not to be the case. Would you describe yourself as full of joy and peace? Would you describe other Christian people as full of joy and peace? I guess that the answer might be, *Well sometimes*. Sometimes I am full of joy and peace, but sometimes, I have to confess, I am not – anything but, in fact. What about you? We're not here to judge one another. Everyone is answerable to God. It is not for you or me to judge God's servants. But how do we judge ourselves? Are we full of joy and peace? Surely, if we were, we would be walking advertisements for faith. People in the world would be saying, *We want some of what they've got*. I expect most of you are like me, sometimes full of joy and peace and sometimes not. Why aren't we full of joy and peace all the time?

The first point to note is that this business of being full of joy and peace is Paul's prayer for Christians. It is a prayer. A prayer is asking for God's grace. Paul is asking God to give us joy and peace. That is what grace is; it is a gift. You can't earn grace. You can't work hard and achieve grace. Grace is a gift. It isn't a matter of trying harder to be full of joy and

peace. When you aren't full of joy and peace, don't make it worse by feeling guilty that you haven't tried hard enough to be joyful and peaceful or that you don't deserve God's gift of joy and peace. Joy and peace are gifts of grace.

Our salvation is God's gift of grace to us. It is not that we are good people; it is not that we deserve to be saved; we are saved by God's gift of His Son. *Remission of our sins and all other benefits of his passion are by the merits and death of thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood.* God has done everything necessary in Christ and everything we receive from God is His free gift to us. It is not something we have to earn. It is grace.

Paul prays for these gifts to *the God of hope*. Why is He the God of hope? For a start, He is the One Who made heaven and earth. There is nothing God cannot do. From the Venite: *The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands prepared the dry land.* Secondly, because He loves us. He doesn't love us because we deserve to be loved. He just loves as we are. (People would do well to remember that when they think that their self worth depends on their appearance or their exam results or even their character. God just loves us as we are. That is what we are worth. It is what every human being is worth. God loves as we are, not for what we look like, not for what we do, not for what we achieve, not because we are such wonderful people, but because we are His people.) *For he is the Lord our God: and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.* It is all of grace. Our faith is that *God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* We have every reason to hope in God.

Jesus said, *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full* (John 15<sup>11</sup>). The very next verse is *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.* Love and joy inseparable, both the gifts of God which we seek in prayer. *Let go and let God.* Paul asks God, we ask God, to fill us (and we ask God to fill one another) with joy and peace. Peace means so much more than the absence of conflict. It means reconciliation. It therefore means healing. It means wholeness. Peace with God, peace with one another, peace in our hearts, peace with ourselves. Peace implies integrity, personal integrity, the integrity of the Church, the integrity of creation. It is the gift of God. *He maketh wars to cease in all the world: he breaketh the bow, and knappeth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariots in the fire.* (Psalm 46<sup>9</sup>). The world isn't like that, is it? And why not? Because people refuse to hear the Word of God. People refuse to submit to the reign of the Prince of Peace. *Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts: as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness;* (the Venite again). Men's hearts have been hardened for thousands of years since the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness ((and indeed before that) and yet *There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.* (Hebrews 4<sup>9</sup>). *Let go and let God.* Trust Him. Trust Him for your life, for the Church and for the world. The blessings are there for the taking. They are the gift of God to us. All that is required from us is faith to receive them. *There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God*

*That ye may abound in hope,* Paul prays. He is praying to the God of hope, the Lord Who made heaven and earth, Whose people we are. So what is our hope in God? Well surely it is that He will look after us in this world and the next. We bring everything to Him in prayer

and He will look after us. He might not give us what we want; He might not give us an easy life; but He will not forsake us. St Paul again: *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* (Romans 8<sup>31&32</sup>). *All things, God will give us all things in Christ. Well might we abound in hope. We can trust God for our own lives. We can trust God for His Church. We can trust God for the whole world. St Paul downplays the significance of individual ministers, but he cannot overstate the significance, the privilege, which all Christians enjoy through faith by the grace of God: Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all our yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.* (I Corinthians 1<sup>21-23</sup>).

And this is all *through the power of the Holy Ghost*. It is that dynamite word again, power. It is by the power of God, by His grace, that we are Christians. It is by the power of God that we continue as Christians. It is by the power of God that we accomplish His purposes in the world, because the only logical response to the fact of the *Remission of our sins and all other benefits of his passion by the merits and death of thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood* is that *we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee, that all we who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction.*

To serve the God Whose service is perfect freedom fulfils Paul's prayer, *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost*, but how that service is perfect freedom is a topic for another day. For now, let go and let God. *There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.*

### Order of Service Advent 2

Hymn 27 On Jordan's Bank / 7 Hills of the North	P148 Creed 6
P249: Collect for Purity	Notices
P250: Ten Commandments	Offertory Sentence
Lighting of Advent Crown	Hymn 264 We Pray Thee Heavenly Father / 271
Collect Advent I p376 (Halling 3 Come Thou Long Expected)	Alleluya Sing to Jesus
Collect Advent 2	Intercessions
Isaiah 11 vv 1-10 (Cuxton Children's Talk)	Penitence p256 (2 <sup>nd</sup> confession)
Hymn 25 The Advent of our God / Psalm 72 p675	Preface p259 (no proper)
Romans 15 vv 1-13	Pp 260 & 261
Hymn 526 When Jesus Came to Jordan / 12 On Jordan's Bank	Communion
Matthew 3 vv 1-12	Lord's Prayer
Sermon	1662 Prayer of Oblation
	Hymn 470 Hills of the North / 15 The Lord Will Come
	Blessing