

Seeds of Hope

Romans 15:4; 8-21

Romans (no. 42 in the series)

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/seeds-of-hope/>

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This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

Prayer

And so, Lord God, we bless your name. I was watching South Park last week. They were at church and the priest said something like, “We bless your name.” And then all the people, in response to the liturgy, said, “Oh yep, it’s a really great name.” God, we do bless your name. Not because Jesus has a ring to it but because we know what it means. And God, if we don’t know what it means, I pray that you would tell us right now. It’s in your name that we pray, amen.

Message

Hey there! I haven’t seen you since last year. In case you didn’t notice I was missing the last two weekends, partying here and in Seattle with my kids. And in case you forgot, one month ago and before Christmas, we were preaching through Romans—didn’t make it all the way through, but at least we made it to the beginning of Paul’s closing remarks. We’ve been preaching through Romans for over a year, so it’s easy to forget things and tempting to think that all of this is very complicated. In a way it is, and yet in another way, it’s really not.

It’s all summed up in Romans 11:32 “God consigned all to disobedience (that is death and evil), that he may have mercy on all (that’s the good and the Life).”ⁱ And so just as the prophets say, Romans 14:11 “As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God.” Paul is quoting Isaiah, who makes it clear that God is promising to save (45:22) and swearing an oath that he will—Isaiah 45:23 “by myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a Word that shall not turn back, ‘to me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear allegiance.’” So, God consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all and that Mercy comes to us as a Word, that is a Seed—a Word that God swears by and a Word that is also himself “by myself, I have sworn.”ⁱⁱ Another way to say all of that is to simply say “God is Salvation.” And, of course, that forms a name, and the name is *Yeshua*, that is, Jesus. In John 17, Jesus reveals that he has the same name as his Father.

The book of Romans is as simple as Jesus—A little child can know Jesus. A little child can hope in Jesus while the rest of us really struggle.

Romans 15:4:

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.

That means that not only the scriptures promising salvation, but all those terrifying scriptures describing death and destruction, were all written down to give us hope. At first that makes no sense, but if you think about it, it makes all the sense in the world. If you ignore the painful passages and pretend that God would never allow you to suffer, you can gain some followers, but in a few years, you'll lose hope. This world is full of death and destruction; there's no way around it. But think about it: Isn't that the exact location in which hope grows?

Romans 15:8-9a:

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised. [Literally translated: "Christ became a minister of circumcision to show God's truthfulness"], **in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and [moreover] that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.**

So, Paul isn't simply saying that Christ became a minister to the circumcised (that's the Jews) and the uncircumcised (that's the Gentiles). He's saying that through Christ, just as God promised to the patriarchs, God circumcises hearts and turns Gentiles into Jews.

Romans 15:9b:

"Therefore, I will praise you ~~among~~ (*en*: literally "in") the Gentiles and sing to your name. (2 Sam. 22:50, Psalm 18:49)"

David wrote that, but the King of the Jews is singing that, in the Gentiles. It's just as Paul writes to the Colossians: "To the saints (that is you) God chose to make known how great ~~among~~ (*en*: literally "in") the Gentiles is this mystery which is Christ in [y'all]."

Romans 15:10:

And again, it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people (Deut. 32:43)."

Notice that Paul is quoting Scripture to give the Romans Hope.

Romans 15:11-13:

And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles [not "some Gentiles," "all you Gentiles"], and let all the peoples extol him (Psalm 117:1)." ¹² And again Isaiah (11:1,10) says, "The root of Jesse will come. [Jesse is David's Father, so the root of Jesse is the Root of David. "I am the root and the seed of David," says Jesus in the Revelation. ⁱⁱⁱ So, the root is also a seed; actually "The Eternal Seed."] **"The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." ¹³ 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 literally, abound in, exceed all measures, overflow with hope.**

And as I mentioned last time, 15 years ago, I was defrocked, and some of you were “excommunicated” with me, for having too much hope. At the time I was just saying that I hoped “every knee would bow, and every tongue give praise,” for God would have “mercy on all.” And the chairman of the committee said, “Peter, you can hope it as long as you confess that it’s impossible.” It’s still amazing to me, that I was defrocked for too much hope, and yet at the same time, I must admit, hope can be utterly terrifying, and almost impossible to talk about, although we all have an idea as to what it is. As I prayed about all of this, this week, I kept thinking of this picture:



I kept thinking of a Nebraska corn field in Winter. My Grandpa Ralph was a farmer in Nebraska, and a couple of times around Christmas we went back to the farm—and it looked like death. There’s nothing quite as barren, bleak, and desolate as a Nebraska corn field in January, I kept thinking of this picture AND this picture:



Usually, we'd go to the farm in July or August and the very same field would look like this. Grandpa grew feed corn and sweet corn—In August, you could walk through the exact same field—and it was a banquet of life, abundant Life. As a kid, the corn was at eye level; you could walk through the field and chow down on all the sweet corn you desired—I actually liked it better raw than cooked; you could eat and eat and eat and not even make a dent in Grandpa's harvest.

You know I think that corn in August was all that much sweeter, because we had visited the farm nine months before in mid-winter. Well, to understand Hope, you have to experience both pictures. Hope is knowledge of Life and death at the same time. Hope is literally the knowledge of Good and evil.

Folks that have never suffered evil, don't hope for the Good, in fact one could argue that they don't even know what it is. And now here's a wild thought: According to Paul in Romans 8:20, God hopes (Which is an utterly fascinating thought, for it implies suffering) God hopes for as Paul writes, "God consigned all creation to futility in Hope."

Hope requires knowledge of Good and evil. And yet the knowledge of evil isn't evil I mean once you gained the knowledge of evil, you might be forever filled with the Good. Evil is like an empty void, It's the not Good, yet to be filled with the Good. Evil is temporal; it comes to an end, but the Good is the End. Hope grows in space and time, but is, itself, eternal—"hope abides."^{iv} We experience it here as an empty field, but we will know it forever as Eternal Life—the very presence of God.



So anyway, I was saying that Hope is knowledge of both pictures. Ignorant people will sometimes say, "If you hope that all will be saved, you're not taking evil seriously, hell seriously, and salvation seriously." Well, I think I've been to hell a bit, praying for a few friends who were trapped there, in bondage to demons and satan. And it was there in those places, and at those times, that I learned to hope. It was there that I realized that evil is a problem far too great for me. It was there that I learned to hope NOT in me, or other people, or institutions, or books, policies, programs, and procedures, but to hope in God and his Word—his living Word Jesus.

Hope is knowledge of both pictures, the evil and the Good; but not just knowledge of those things, but also the way you get from one to the other. You see, there's only one Way and Hope is the Way; Jesus is the Way. "In this hope"—that creation (and we are creation) will be set free from futility—"In this hope, we are saved" wrote Paul in Romans 8. To hope in yourself and your judgment isn't hope; it's what the Scripture refers to as "wantonness"—wantonness is seizing control of the thing, or the things, that you desire.^v

The Sheep that leaves the Shepherd to find the Grass is wanton. But the Sheep that follows the Shepherd does not "want."^{vi} And yet, that Sheep hopes in the Shepherd for grass and all good things. Hope is surrendered desire, but it's still desire; it's actually an even greater desire—it's a desire so big and so beautiful that you know that you, yourself, cannot fulfill it. And you see, that's what makes hope so painful, and apparently dangerous. Surrendering control always feels like death, and maybe it is.

My flesh loves control. Institutions love control. And I suspect that's why I was defrocked for too much hope. Maximum hope is minimum control, and that is more than a bit terrifying for everyone, particularly for those in control. And Paul is talking about Maximum Hope—hope, even for those who have no hope. It's hope that everyone will hope "all things:" Maximum Hope. And in Romans 5, Paul told us, "Hope does not disappoint us."^{vii} So, hope isn't just a wish; It's the presence of the Future.

Romans 12: "The Root of Jesse will come...[and] in him the Gentiles will hope." Paul keeps mentioning hope and "gentiles." I once read that Hitler was the first to define "the Jews" as a race and maybe there's some truth to that but I doubt that the first was Hitler.

The Jews started as a race—the children of Judah—but Paul and all of Scripture define Judaism as a faith, and the sign of that faith is circumcision.

- In Romans 2 Paul told us that one is a Jew inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart.
- In Romans 11 Gentiles are grafted into the family tree, for we were all circumcised in Jesus, our husband, at the cross.
- In Exodus 12:48 God tells the Israelites that if a foreigner would live with them and desire to eat the Passover, "let him be circumcised and he will be as a native [*ezrah*]." That's a Jew.
- In Ephesians Paul refers to the Ephesians as "Gentiles in the flesh," but at the end of the letter he tells them to not live as "the Gentiles." So, what does Paul really mean by "Gentile," except for one who doesn't fully hope in the God of Israel, one who doesn't believe.

It is my experience that Christians often think that the book of Romans is about ending racism between Jews and Gentiles, and then we use it to propose a far more insidious form of racism, and insurmountable division, between those that are destined to believe, and those that can't believe, between those that God loves and those that God doesn't love, between those that are good and those that are evil, between those that hope and those that cannot hope and must be endlessly tortured—the Nazi's are lightweights next to that. When we read "gentile," I think we

should hear “unbeliever.” So how do the faithless get faith? How do the hopeless hope? How do the unsaved get saved?

Verse 12: “The root of Jesse (which is also the Seed), will come. Verse 13: “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.

Romans 15:14:

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

Paul just told Romans, whom he hadn’t met, that they contained all knowledge. So, Paul is lying or maybe Paul actually believes what he says in other places, like 1 Corinthians 3:8, “You are God’s field.”^{viii} You know a field of dirt contains no knowledge, until, into that field, someone drops a seed. I’ve always remembered a phrase that I once heard in a sermon^{ix}—a word contains the future in its bosom, like a seed. In every seed there is DNA—all the knowledge necessary to turn dirt into a life, like the life that is a tree.

The biggest trees in my neighborhood—ancient cottonwoods—started as the tiniest seeds, seeds you wouldn’t even notice in the soil of your backyard.



This is my life tree. It’s about fifty years old and I’ve had to cut it back numerous times in order to keep it in my house. It’s a schefflera tree that I got from my grandpa when I was in Junior high. Over the years I keep having to add dirt to this pot, because the tree mixes the dirt with light and turns it into life; it’s eating the dirt. If there’s a seed that turns dirt into eternal life, then a day will come when everything will be life, and death will be no more. Well, Paul believes that you are a field. And Paul also believes that Jesus is the Seed. “In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” writes Paul.^x

Romans 15:14b-16:

[You are] filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. ¹⁵ But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶ to be a minister (*leitourgos*^{xi}: like a priest in the temple) of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles in the priestly service of (making a sacrifice of) the gospel of God^{xii}, so that the offering^{xiii} of the Gentiles^{xiv} may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul seems to be saying that, when he preaches the Gospel, he is sacrificing the Word like a priest in the temple, or a farmer dropping a seed into the soil—A sacrifice, so that hopeless unbelievers would then sacrifice themselves^{xv} in hope; in other words, that they would love as they have been loved.

Romans 15:17:

In Christ Jesus, then, I have ~~reason to be proud of my work for~~ [literally: “the boast unto”] God.

In Chapter 3 Paul wrote “what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.” So, you have no reason to boast in the work of Me-sus, but you must boast in the work of Jesus in and through you, which is the true you.

Romans 15:18-19a:

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience...(that’s “the obedience of faith,” as he told us at the start of Romans.^{xvi}) (So, I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring [the unbelievers to belief, the unfaithful to faith, the hopeless to hope—how?])—by word (*logos*) and deed (*ergon*: work) [actually, a word incarnate in deed],¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.

Signs and wonders produce hope, but religious folks make two fatal mistakes in regard to signs and wonders that crucify hope. We either:

1. Try to control signs and wonders, in which case their no longer wonder-full and no longer signs pointing to God but pointing to us. OR
2. Frustrated that we can’t control signs and wonders, we tell folks that signs and wonders don’t happen at all.

In my experience, they most definitely happen, and yet they’re incredibly frustrating because I can’t just make them happen. I think that’s because the point is hope in God and not in me and not a little hope—but maximum hope. God wants you to hope, and not only hope that he would heal your back, but that he would heal all creation and even your soul, even your enemy’s soul. If you only hope for yourself, you’re hoping yourself right on to the outer darkness where you will weep and gnash your teeth alone.

Romans 15:19b-20:

...by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum [that’s like Croatia] I have

fulfilled^{xvii} the ministry of the gospel of Christ [*euangelion*: Good News]; ²⁰ **and thus I make it my ambition** [*Philotimeomai*: labor of love] **to preach the gospel** [*euangelizo*: evangelize, announce Good News], **not where Christ has already been named...**

I love how he says that, as if Christ is absolutely everywhere, in Athens, in Rome, and in your unbelieving neighbor—but just waiting to be named. The Word is everywhere, like a seed lying dormant in the soil. Or perhaps, an egg in a womb, waiting to be fertilized by a seed from you.

And so, the Word is in your neighbor—just as Paul told us in chapter 10—the Word is in your neighbor, waiting to be named by the Word spoken through you, when you proclaim “Jesus.” That’s his name. It’s then, that the Word rises from the tomb and begins to grow as Faith, Hope and Love in your neighbor.

Romans 15:20-21a:

I make it my ambition [*Philotimeomai*: labor of love] **to preach the gospel** [*euangelizo*: evangelize, announce Good News], **not where Christ has already been named** [Perhaps Christ is waiting to be named in every person you meet? Perhaps your called to boldly go where no man has gone before.] ²¹ **but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see....”**

Has anyone ever told you that those who haven’t been told and haven’t heard are damned so as to never see and never understand? Scripture says:

Romans 15:21b:

“Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand [*suniami*].”

Now logically, “Those” would at least include everyone not born before Paul wrote this letter or even before Isaiah prophesied these words. They will understand [*suniami*]; it’s a fascinating word study; it’s a word that Paul only uses in one other location in Romans 3:10 “As it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands [*suniami*]’”

Suniami is a cognate in Greek: *sun* is “with” and *hiemi* “to send.” It means “to bring together.” It is that moment when all the facts come together revealing the meaning, the moment when all the experiences add up to a plot. It is the moment when all the elements—carbon, calcium, oxygen—come together and become a living person and you meet him.



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

You know you could look at the fruit hanging on this tree and think it's like a set of facts that you could take, dissect, utilize, and control—but it would be dead, and you would be dead; you would have gained knowledge of evil. Or you could look at the fruit on this tree, and see that He is the Life, then all those facts would come together in a person, who is your husband, and you would meet him, and know him for he would know you. That's *suniami*. You would "understand."^{xviii}

When Jesus told the parable of the soils, he quoted Isaiah 6 saying, "This is why I speak to them in parables because (or "so that"^{xix}) seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand (*suniami*)."^{xx} Why would Jesus speak so that they wouldn't hear, except so that when they do understand, they would also know that understanding itself is the miracle, like a seed coming to life having been buried in the soil, like faith by grace and this not of ourselves, only faith understands.

Isaiah 6:13 ...The holy seed is its stump.

Isaiah 11:1 The root of Jesse will come...
The wolf will dwell with the lamb... For the earth shall be full of
the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:10 ...in him will the gentiles hope.

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountain are the feet of him who brings
good news, ...who publishes salvation [*yashuwah*].

Isaiah 52:15 So shall he sprinkle many nations [*goyim*: gentiles]; Kings shall
shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been
told them they see, and that which they have not heard they
understand.

"Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand." That's Isaiah 52:15 and Paul just quoted Isaiah 11:1 and 10. Verse 1 was "The root of Jesse will come..." and verse 10, "in him will the gentiles hope."^{xxi} In between those verses Isaiah prophesies the most incredible hope. "The wolf will dwell with the lamb, the nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, etc., etc." That is, creation will stop devouring itself, and all

will be made new. “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of *Yahweh*, as the waters cover the sea.” Because the root of Jesse, the Seed, has come.

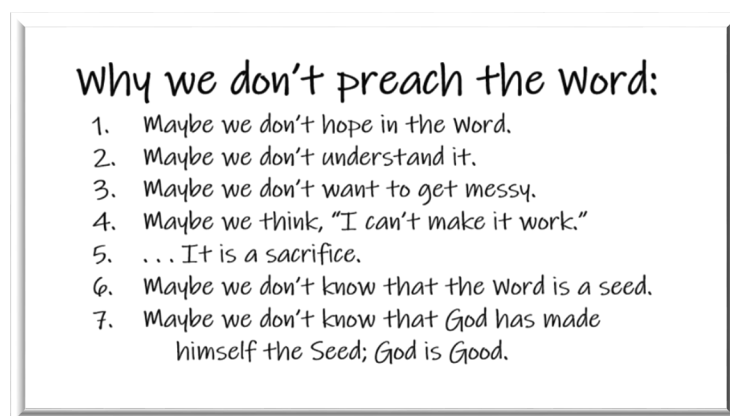
In Isaiah 6,^{xxii} Isaiah is instructed by God to prophesy Israel down to utter destruction, until all that remains is a stump. Then God says, “the holy seed is it’s substance; it’s stump.” It’s as if Israel is this tree, or false tree, which grew from a seed—but grew in the wrong way—and God has Isaiah chop it down to a stump. But from the stump, from the root of Jesse, grows a new tree in exactly the same spot (I bet it’s the middle of the garden). In this tree is eternal life.^{xxiii} And hopefully all of that sounds familiar to you, Adam.

In Isaiah 52 Isaiah prophesies “How beautiful upon the mountain are the feet of him who brings good news... who publishes salvation [*yashuwah*].” In Hebrew “salvation” is pronounced “*yashuah*,” which sounds just like the name “*Yeshua*,” which literally means “God is Salvation,” and in English is pronounced Jesus.^{xxiv}

Isaiah 52:7 “How beautiful are the feet of him, who publishes Jesus.” Isaiah 52:15 “So shall he sprinkle many nations (*goyim*: that is gentiles)” He will sprinkle blood (*nazah*) like the priests that sprinkle the blood of sacrifice upon the people of Israel. Isaiah continues “kings shall shut their mouths because of him for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.”

They see and understand Jesus, who is the Seed, who is the Word that you know and can speak. We do speak the Word, but we also don’t speak the Word. Why don’t we speak the Word; why don’t we publish the Word; why don’t we plant the Seed all the time? Do you know why my grandpa planted the Seed? Hope. He hoped in the Seed.

So, why don’t we preach the Word?



1. Maybe we don’t hope in the Word, and what is the Word?

“God is salvation” period. “God is Salvation” regardless of you. It’s God’s decision, not yours. So, we don’t “preach to a decision;” we preach THE DECISION that changes the world. It’s not the dirt that transforms the Seed, but the Seed that transforms the dirt—you, ignorant dirt bag named Adam

People say, “If you hope that God will save all, you won’t preach the Word.” But it was because Grandpa hoped in the seed, that he planted the seed. He never said, “I didn’t plant the seed, for I had too much hope in the seed.” Now, if he hadn’t planted the seed, the field would lay fallow until he did, but the seed would still be the seed. And the seed we sow doesn’t change; it is “the same yesterday, today, and forever;” it is eternal.^{xxv}

2. Maybe we don’t understand it?

You know I never remember my grandpa coming in from the field weeping to my Grandma, saying “Ivy, I couldn’t plant the seed because I just don’t understand the seed and I sure as hell can’t explain it. I’m inadequate.” You know, no one can explain a seed, and yet we can begin to understand a seed, if we plant it, a little child can plant a seed. You don’t have to know “how God saves” to announce, “God is salvation.” People will say, “Peter I love what you say, but I don’t know how to say it.” Yes, you do; just say “God is Salvation” or “Jesus.”

3. Maybe we don’t want to get messy.

If you preach Jesus, you will have to get honest, and go to some desolate, painful, broken, and dirty places—like a Nebraska field in mid-winter. But you know I never remember Grandpa coming in from the field and saying “Ivy, I couldn’t plant the seed, because there was just too much dirt, and manure, and it was, like, all broken up.” How stupid is it to think, “There’s no hope for them, for “those people;” they’re too dirty, too full of Crap, too broken—they’re like a fertilized field, that’s just been plowed, and so there’s no point in planting the Seed.”

4. Maybe we think “I can’t make it work.”

You know that’s the temptation of religion, we come to think we can make it work, so if you just pray this prayer, take this class, follow this program, we can make it work. But when we build a factory in the field and make it work, we don’t make people, we make false people and we don’t grow fruit, we manufacture fake fruit. It will draw a crowd, but it won’t raise the dead, or grow faith, hope, and love.

I never remember grandpa coming in from the field and saying, “I didn’t plant the seed, because for the life of me, I don’t know how to make it work.” Listen closely: You can’t make Jesus work; just plant the seed and he will work you and the dirtbags around you. But you will have to wait, patiently. Grandpa never dug up the seed to see if it was working, because then it wouldn’t work. You can’t make the Word work, and if you act like you can make it work, you just testify that God is not salvation, and you are salvation, and so crucify the Word, and yet, like I said, it cannot be stopped; it will rise from the dead; it’s a seed.

5. Maybe we don’t preach the word because well, it is a sacrifice.

So, if you preach Jesus, you’ll sacrifice Me-sus, and probably think it’s Jesus... and in a way it is—he dies with you and rises with you. And this is the crazy thing about planting seeds, it’s not seizing control, but surrendering control of the very thing you desire. A kernel of corn is a kernel

of food... or a new creation and a world of food if you plant it. “Unless a kernel falls into the earth and it dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit,” said Jesus, the Seed.

6. Maybe we don’t hope in the Word and know that the Word is Hope.

In other words, we don’t believe that the Word is seed and that we come from that seed, so even our decision to plant the seed is the work of the Word. We don’t believe the Word is a Seed and so, we blame the dirt and don’t plant the Seed.

For 1500 years most of the institutional church has put their hope in the dirt and so stopped scattering the seed. We’ve blamed the dirt and kept the seed to ourselves, safe in a jar called the church, unaware that the seed is actually a seed—eternal, indestructible, exceedingly abundant, all-powerful HOPE. The Seed is Hope.

Romans 5:5 “Now hope does not disappoint, for the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”^{xxvi} Why does Love in us, mean that hope won’t disappoint us? Well because, it’s Love in you, that’s doing all the hoping and God is love. And “Love bears all things, believes (faiths) all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love does not fail”^{xxvii} The Seed is not dependent on you; you are utterly dependent on the Seed.

7. Maybe we don’t plant the seed, for we don’t believe that God has made himself the Seed and invited us to share in his joy.

When I was a kid the greatest honor was when Dad would let me plant the seed, for I knew that the seed was Good. Maybe you can tell; I’m hoping that you would hope, and implant seeds of hope, wherever you go, where no one else can go. And you see that’s every relationship you have. You can boldly go where I cannot go, and where no man has gone before, except Jesus. So, when people expose a little dirt to you—when they confide in you, saying something like, “I feel desolate, barren, and broken; I feel like shit; I feel hopeless,” Plant the Seed!

Sometimes it might just be a hug testifying that you have Hope for them. Even better a Word, you can just say “Jesus,” or “God Saves, he is Salvation.” And if they say, “Well not for me,” you can start planting Scripture.

“All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God, and all are made right by his Grace as a gift...” (Romans 3:23) Have hope.

- “When you cry Abba, it’s the Spirit of Jesus in you crying Abba” (Romans 8)
- “God consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” (Romans 11)
- “Every knee will bow, and every tongue give praise” (Romans 13)
- “Behold, I make all things New” says the voice from the throne in Revelation 21.

You don’t have to understand it, defend it, or explain it. JUST PLANT IT!^{xxviii} It may get messy, you may feel ridiculous because you can’t make it work, you may even suffer the loss of all things but PLANT THE SEED, because you don’t have faith in the dirt; you have put your hope in the Seed.

In our sermon from Romans 11, entitled “You Can Go to Hell,” I told you about the weird experiences that some of us had in the old church building on 30th and Vallejo which we were renting 12 years ago.



We recorded this bizarre dark shadow on video, then got rid of it through prayer, and then started having these weird encounters with ghosts.

The last time it happened, my wife (our cleaning lady) came to get me for she heard weeping on the other side of this crawl space door in the bottom of the church. To make a long story very short, in that dark room under the Old Sanctuary, my wife, saw these figures cowering in the darkness. We had learned that they weren't demons, (demons react violently to the Word); they were what the Bible calls phantasma, familiar spirits or ghosts--the souls of people who would not hear the Word.

And so, I prayed that Jesus would reveal himself and he did, along with a door that opened behind him to what Susan described as an entire new creation—she saw it.



The other side of the door looked like my grandpa's corn field in August. But on our side of the door, it was mid-winter.



Jesus appeared in glory, and Susan said, “Peter they won’t look up; they’re still cowering in the darkness covering their eyes.” And so, I just began to tell them about Jesus. I published *Yashuwah*. I just said stuff like, “He doesn’t hate you; he loves you; he came to save you; he doesn’t condemn you; he has forgiven you; he knows you and he likes you; And look, he makes all things new.”

As I was speaking, Susan started whispering in my ear, “Peter some of them are starting to look up, and the moment they see him, they rise and go to him, transformed by him and then they pass through that door.” So, what made them look up?

It wasn’t me. It was hope, embedded in those words, like Knowledge and Life embedded in a seed... and I didn’t make the life, the knowledge, or the Seed. My Father in Heaven isn’t dependent on me; he had just given me the wonderful honor of planting the seed, so I would share in his joy.



And then Susan said, “But Peter some of them won’t look up.” Their hearts were hard, but did you know—and trust me, I’m a geologist—did you know that at the surface of the earth, even the hardest of rocks, eventually turns to dirt and will surrender to the seed. The last thing Susan heard Jesus say that day in that room, under the stage, in the very spot, where I would stand and preach each week, was “I’m leaving this door here, for those that will still come.”

I’ve told you that story before, but this is my point right now: just a couple of years before that day, I would preach to about 1700 folks in a brand-new building and everyone liked me. But now I was preaching to one or two hundred; I had been branded a heretic and felt like an absolute fool because nothing seemed to be working.

But after that day, I’d stand in that spot, and remember that whether I see it or not, whether I wait a thousand years or just a day, no matter how dirty the dirt, shitty the shit, or broken the broken. The power is in the Seed, so put your hope in the Seed and sacrifice your kingdom of dirt—Our Father is inviting us to share in his Joy.

Communion

And so, the Root of Jesse, who is the Word by whom all things are created, took the bread, broke it, saying this is my body given to you. And, in the same way, he took the cup, saying this is the Covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you and do it in remembrance of me. This is the Seed. You are the field. Put the Seed in the field and then boldly go where no man has gone before and plant it. In Jesus name, amen.

Benediction

Have you ever noticed how weird some of the songs are that we sing? “I’m hungry for you, thirsty for you.” You know, the early Christians were persecuted because the Romans said they were cannibals. Maybe all of humanity are cannibals or a wife, a bride. So what is he—food or

seed? We eat him like soil eats a seed, but in reality the seed is eating the soil. The Seed is so good it transforms that shitty soil into life and even more seed. That's how good God (the seed) is. I don't know if the institution called "the Sanctuary" will ever get big or impressive in the world's eyes. But what matters is that we plant the Seed, for "we will all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ." And on that day, the thing that will make us lift our heads and enter is Hope. And so, if it comes down to all this stuff or the seed, always choose the Seed. The Seed is eternal, the Seed cannot be stopped, and the Seed has already conquered. He's just revealing that to us so that, having hoped in him, we would share his joy because that's who we are. So, in Jesus' name, plant the seed. And I'm so thankful for you—the Sanctuary—because you do plant the seed; we believe together. So believe the Gospel, plant Jesus, in his name, amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ In the first part of the book Paul makes a watertight case for the fact that we've all been consigned to disobedience, that is *none are righteous, no one understands, all have sinned and fallen short, all have died in Adam*. But then in the middle of chapter 3 he starts making the point that God has had, and is having, *Mercy on all*, for all are *justified by grace through faith*, and *will be made alive in Christ*, and so the word of the prophet is fulfilled *every knee will bow and every tongue give praise*. God will create humanity (Adam) in his own image, everything will be good, we will know it's good and praise God for The Good, which is the Life.

ⁱⁱ God creates all things, including us, with this Word... and on the Seventh day, that is the Eternal Sabbath, everything is Good, and it is finished.

ⁱⁱⁱ Revelation 22:16

^{iv} 1 Corinthians 13:13

^v I think it may be impossible to hope or desire anything but the Good, it's just that we don't know what it is, and we seek it in the wrong way, which is actually no way. To hope for "evil things" is to hope for nothing which you think is something; it is to desire a lie. "Everything created by God is good" wrote Paul.

^{vi} Psalm 23:1

^{vii} Romans 5:5 NRSV

^{viii} "Neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but only God who brings the growth... You are God's field." –1 Corinthians 3:7-8

^{ix} I think it was Fred Craddock who said this or something very close to this.

^x Colossians 2:3

^{xi} This is where we get our word "liturgy."

^{xii} ²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered [*paradidomai*] to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed [*paradidomai*] took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. –1 Corinthians 3:23-26

Notice that it is primarily the apostle Paul who applied this concept to his apostolic office, and that he once did so, namely, in [1 Corinthians 11:23](#), in such a way that in the same verse he also applied it to Judas' treachery: "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed (delivered), took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it. . . ." The two "deliveries" are obviously mutually determinative, so that Paul is set in the shadow of Judas, as Judas is set in the light of Paul. There is no apostolic ["handing-over, betrayal" (*paradidomai*)] which does not have behind it the judgment of Judas' ["handing-over, betrayal" (*paradidomai*)] : the handing-over of which Judas and the Jews made

themselves guilty by their handing-over, is taken up again, on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the delivery which calls the Church into life in all the world—the delivery of the apostles, of whom Paul is the least, and the one who worked more than they all.

--Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 11.2: The Doctrine of God*, p.483

^{xiii} And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. —Isaiah 66:20

^{xiv} Gentiles were forbidden from approaching the altar in the temple, but these gentiles are made holy by the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Jesus—and offered to God as a sacrifice.

^{xv} I call upon you, therefore, brethren, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies a sacrifice—living, sanctified, acceptable to God—your intelligent service; and be not conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, for your proving what is the will of God—the good, and acceptable, and perfect. – Romans 12:1-2 YLT

^{xvi} Romans 1:5 (the beginning) AND 16:26 (the end); “faith unto faith.” “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith (Romans 1:16-17).”

^{xvii} We naturally think, “Paul how could you say that? There’s so much left to do!” But Paul knew that he had done what he had been asked to do, and that was plant the Seed.

^{xviii} And might very well be pregnant.

^{xix} *Hoti* is most commonly translated “that” rather than “because.” This appears to be the meaning in Isaiah 6 and is clearly the meaning from John 12:42.

^{xx} This is Matthew 13:13. The ESV translated the next verse, which is the quotation of Isaiah 6:9 as “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” The word translated “never” is the Greek Word “ou” which is almost always translated “not” and never translated “never” in the KJV. The people that do not understand are “all of Israel” in Isaiah 6, which would include the Apostle Paul and everyone that Isaiah goes on to say will understand.

^{xxi} This is precisely how Isaiah 11:10 is translated in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of Isaiah that Paul’s readers would have read)

^{xxii} quoted by Luke in Acts, Paul in the Epistles, and Jesus in every Gospel!

^{xxiii} In the same way we all take fruit from the tree of knowledge and grow a *tupos*, an old man, but the old man must die for in his place is revealed the new man who is our eternal life. A beautiful picture of all of this is found in Daniel chapter 4. Nebuchadnezzar is a picture of humanity (Adam) and Daniel speak the Word. Nebuchadnezzar is a tree in “the middle of the earth” (like the middle of the garden), but he has grown a kingdom of arrogance, and so the tree is cut down, but the stump is bound with an iron band and left in the field just as Nebuchadnezzar loses his mind and is left in the field like an Ox. But after “seven periods of time,” “the end of days,” Nebuchadnezzar lifts his eyes to heaven and worships, His kingdom is restored—it’s a new (and eternal) kingdom that’s grown from the old stump. But the whole thing is the work of the Seed: the Word of God. It was the Word that created Nebuchadnezzar and the Word that recreated Nebuchadnezzar.

^{xxiv} In John 17:12 Jesus reveals that he and the father have the same name; it must be Salvation.

^{xxv} “To this end we toil and strive” writes Paul (1 Timothy 4:19) “because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”

Whenever people are saved, it’s God who does the saving, and no one is fully saved until they believe....

^{xxvi} NKJV

^{xxvii} 1 Corinthians 13:7-8

^{xxviii} And when they protest, just ask them, “Do you think those Scriptures aren’t true? I suspect all Scriptures are true, and I know, *God is Salvation*”