

ROMANS - OVERFLOWING WITH HOPE  
A SERMON BASED ON ROMANS 15:4-13  
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO  
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2019  
10:00 a.m.

I'm sports fan.

But I'm not a sports nut.

I'm a playoff bandwagon kind of fan.

Not a 'been with the Leafs since '67' kind of fan.

I'm a, "You've got tickets and you invited me? Sure I'll come!"

kind of fan.

I'm not a 'the kids can figure out their own education fund,

I'm getting season's tickets' kind of fan.

So generally this means I need to be brought up to speed

when I get on the bandwagon or when I'm invited to the game.

Because friends and family assume I'm not overly knowledgeable,

and for the most part, they are right,

but sometimes I can have a little fun

when they assume I have no knowledge at all.

I got invited to a Buffalo Bills game, first one.

I asked if it would be okay if I wore green.

I was told, 'no, that's not okay.'

I asked if orange would be okay.

I was told, 'no, orange would not be okay.'

I asked "What about what about black and gold?"

I was asked, 'Are you trying to get us killed?'

Even I know, that you don't show up to an NFL game

in the wrong coloured jersey,

unless you are prepared to take some abuse,

with your fingers crossed

that it will at least be good natured abuse,

because based on what I saw, there are no guarantees.

If you wear the wrong coloured jersey on purpose

you go in with some hope

that a shared love for the game will override

any allegiance to a colour.

One can hope.

The book of Romans is a letter that the apostle Paul wrote  
to the church in the city of ancient Rome.

Rome was a premier city of the world.

Like our premier cities of the world,

it was cosmopolitan, international and multiracial.

All kinds of people were showing up for church.

All kinds of people were becoming followers of Jesus,  
were becoming Christians.

People didn't know what colour jersey to wear.

Jews were becoming followers of Jesus.

But so were Gentiles.

Slaves were becoming followers of Jesus,

But so were their owners,

and so were others who were free men and women.

Men were becoming followers of Jesus,

So were women.

We have Bible stories of fishermen and lawyers

those on high council and women

all becoming followers of Jesus

There were rural Galileans  
and an African eunuch who held a position  
of high power in the Ethiopian Queen's palace.  
Rural and urban.  
Educated and labourer.  
They were all showing up.

There was starting to be some scuffling,  
about the jerseys,  
and how to run Jesus follower plays.

Could a Jesus follower eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol  
even if was just the leftovers that had made it to market?

What about the day apart? When should a Jesus follower take a day?

Would it still be Saturday? The Jewish Sabbath.

Or would it be Sunday - the first day of the week

the day of resurrection

as some of the new followers of Jesus were doing?

Paul, knowing that with diversity

there is an especially strong need for grace and graciousness

and a large patience required for differences,

and an accommodating allowance for that and for those

which and who are taking an alternate perspective or practice...

Paul, knowing this, shares his prayer.

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement

give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus

so that with one heart and mouth

you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

He says,

‘Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you,

in order to bring praise to God.’

One can hope.

The church historically hasn't done a great job at this.

This spirit of unity.

The 2001 World Christian Encyclopedia

counted 33,830 denominations worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

Considering the great Schism between the Roman Catholic  
and Eastern Orthodox in the 11<sup>th</sup> century  
to the endless fragmenting of the Protestant churches  
at the time of the Reformation,  
to the creation of denominations based on nationality  
or geographic area,  
or differences in theology big and small,  
it might seem that Paul's prayer wasn't answered.

That is just denominations.

We haven't even looked in the windows of individual congregations.

There is plenty of difference in any congregation  
and we are no exception.

All you have to do is mention that there is an election coming up,  
and watch as people reach for their jerseys.

Never mind individual congregations,  
simply watch what happens

around the dining room table in your family.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/d/denominations/>

Paul prays for unity as we follow Jesus.

One can hope.

As you move through Romans,

you can hear Paul giving continual coaching and advice  
to a church that is so very diverse.

He says,

“The commandments are summed up in this one rule.

Love your neighbour as yourself.

Love does no harm to its neighbour.

Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

He says,

“Accept the one whose faith is weak without passing judgement  
on disputable matters.

Make up your mind not to put a stumbling block in each other’s way.

Make every effort to do what leads to peace

and to mutual edification.

Each of us should please their neighbour,

to build them up.”

He says,

“Everything that was written in the past,”

and here Paul is referring to the Bible,

“everything was written

to teach us,

so that through the endurance and the encouragement

of the Scriptures,

we might have hope.”

One can hope.

In the summation of the law,

love your neighbour as yourself,

in the prayer of Paul,

may the God who gives endurance and encouragement

give you a spirit of unity among yourselves

as you follow Christ.

It is in following Christ,

in being shown his steps to follow and in taking steps he takes

it is there, following Christ, we find our hope.

Following Christ is our unity.

Accepting each other, in the way Christ accepted us is our peace.



Together, following Jesus and taking his steps

is our hope.

One can hope.

Chuck Colson is an author who tells the story of a group of young people,

at a church named Shively *Christian* Church.

Their youth minister was a young man named Dave Stone.

This youth group were fiercely competitive with their neighbour,

the youth group from Shively *Baptist* Church.

They were competitive in all things, especially in softball.

The youth from Shively Christian Church

were also serious about their faith.

They faithfully attended the summer Bible camp

their youth minister Dave led.

One week, the Bible lesson was about Jesus washing his disciples feet.

To help them with the servanthood lesson,

Dave the youth minister,

divided the kids into groups and told them to go out

and find practical ways to be servants.

He said,

'I want you to be Jesus in this city for the next two hours,

Figure out how he would help people and go do it.'

Two hours later the youth reconvened at the church,

reporting back to one another what they had done.

One group had done two hours of yard work for an elderly man.

Another group bought ice cream treats and delivered them

to several of the older women in the congregation.

A third group went and visited a church member in the hospital

and gave him a card.

Another group went to a nursing home and sang Christmas carols,

even though it was the middle of summer.

One of the residents had said it was the warmest Christmas

she could remember.

When the fifth group stood up and reported what they had done,

everyone groaned.

This group had made its way over to none other than their arch rival

Shively *Baptist* Church

and asked their minister if he knew someone who needed help.

The minister sent them to the home of an elderly woman  
who needed yard work done.

There, for two hours,

they mowed grass, raked the yard and trimmed hedges.

When they were getting ready to leave,

the woman called the group together

and thanked them for their hard work.

'I don't know how I could get along without you,'

she told them.

'You kids at Shively Baptist are always coming to my rescue.'

The youth minister Dave interrupted.

Shively Baptist!

I sure hope you set her straight

and told her you were from Shively *Christian* Church.

Why, no, we didn't, the kids said.

We didn't think it mattered.

One can hope.

May the God of hope

fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,

so that you may overflow with hope,

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.