

Sermon Romans 16 25 27 4th S in Advent Series B

Sermon: 4th Sunday in Advent

Text: Romans 16:25-27

Theme: The revelation of the mystery

Goal: To show how God revealed His mysterious plan in Jesus “so that all nations might believe”.

Dear Friends,

Introd.: A mystery creates an expectation! We want to know what will happen and how the mystery will be solved. Many books are written on this base, creating a climate of expectation, so that the reader become excited, even nervous, and cannot stop reading until the mystery is revealed!

When I was a child, my parents set up the Christmas tree only on the 24th in the morning, and it was locked into the lounge till it was unveiled after the Christmas Play in the church late in the night. We children used to walk in front of the door of the lounge, trying to see the Christmas Tree and to find out if there was a gift under the Christmas tree. It was a big expectation and we became very excited!

Paul talks about a mystery of God, which has been revealed now. This is the sense of Advent and Christmas Season: To renew our expectation about the coming of Jesus and our salvation, “a mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known.” Are we still excited about God's mysteries and promises?

I – We are established by God

We, who were once far from the promises, are now God's children and celebrate Christmas with joy! Paul talks about our actual situation when he writes: “God is able to establish you by my Gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ.” The Gospel is the proclamation of Jesus

Christ and “it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Through the Gospel we were called from darkness to light, and by the Gospel we are established as God's children. God empowers us and keeps us going as long as we are linked with His Gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments. When we don't use God's Means of Grace, we become weak. When we use them, God empowers us and establishes us.

Therefore: Don't miss the Word and the Sacrament. Don't stay at home on Sunday morning. I know that we have many excuses and sometimes it is really impossible to come because of our duties or when we are sick. But we have to organize our time and our schedule in a way that we can come and be nurtured by the Gospel. God “establishes us by His Gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ”.

II – God's mystery revealed

This God's gracious plan to save us and to empower us, even as not members of the original people of God, comes from far. But it was not always as clear as now. In the past, in the Old Testament, it was a mystery. It was like a puzzle: from time to time God gave another piece of the puzzle to His prophets, revealing what was in His heart. And the main pieces of the puzzle were given by God at Christmas and at Easter. The whole picture became clear and every piece makes sense.

Paul wrote to the Colossians (1:25-27): I have become (God's) servant ... to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people...the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

When we read the Old Testament, it is not always easy to understand the message. The Psalm and the OT readings for today presented prophecies about the Eternal kingdom promised to king David, pointing to Jesus, the son of David. - It was not easy for the believers of the Old

Testament to understand God's plan for them and for the entire world. It was really a mystery that had to be accepted by faith, without doubting. This helps to understand why so few came to see the baby in the manger and why people rejected Jesus and asked for His crucifixion. But there was no excuse for them. It was a mystery, but it had to be accepted by faith, as Abraham and many other did it in the old ages.

Thanks God that the mystery was revealed in Christ! The letter to the Hebrews begins saying: “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son .” This is just the same what Paul writes in our text: “God establishes us... according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God.”

The coming of Jesus was the unveiling of God's secret plan. The Advent anticipation was answered by God Himself. Jesus came in His person as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. And now, the revelation of and by Jesus Christ is the subject matter of Paul's Gospel. The time of waiting may have seemed long, but remember that God is eternal. His plan has long past, and its fulfillment was worth waiting for. (Series B p.22).

The watch of God is different from our watch. We live in time. He lives in eternity. Peter wrote about our expectation of the second coming of Jesus: “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come!... You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God. (2 Peter 3:8,9.11). After the coming of Jesus at the first Christmas, God creates a new expectation about Jesus' second coming. We are still aware and waiting for it!

III – The revealed mystery is for all

A big detail of God's revealed mystery is that Jesus came for all, not just for the Jews. Paul writes: “so that all nations might believe and obey Him.” When God called Abraham, He promised him: “And all people on earth will be blessed through you.” (Gen 12:3). This was an anticipation of what Jesus said: “Go into all the word and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). But the Jewish people were very exclusive, thinking that the promises were only for them. When the first pagans were converted, it was difficult to the Jewish Christians to accept the Gentile Christians. Paul, who was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles, had to argue hard with some church leaders of the first Christian church about this. But the mystery of God's salvation in and through Christ was for all! And this has to be proclaimed nowadays as well, when segregation is still a reality among Christians! Always remember: We were not from the original chosen people of God. But we are the chosen people of the new covenant in Jesus Christ now.

Conclusion: Paul finishes this text, which is the conclusion of the letter to the Romans as well, with a Gloria: “To the only wise God be glory for ever though Jesus Christ! Amen!” “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests” (Luke 2:14) the angels sang at the first Christmas. “*Glory to God*” is what we sing at every service, praising our God for His grace and love in Jesus Christ. Religion and faith is not something just for us, as many try to take advantages from their membership in a church. The primary aim of religion and faith is to adore and to praise a god. We recognize and believe that there is only one God, who reveals Himself in the Bible as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We trust in that God who loves and forgives us, accepting us as His children in Jesus Christ. And we serve our God, obeying Him and singing Him praise and glory!

Let us celebrate this Christmas with thanksgiving and joy, for the mystery of God is revealed for us in Christ Jesus! Amen

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle – Cape Town, 18 December 2011