**1 Corinthians 1:3-9 (ESV)**

**3**  Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **4** I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, **5** that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— **6** even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— **7** so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, **8**  who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9**  God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**“Shape By What Comes”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. What comes into our life during the holiday season changes us. The ads for Black Friday always seem to drive people into a frenzy to search for the best deals. So powerful the influence, some even skipped Thanksgiving this year since sales started on Thursday. Where spending directs us to the stores, cards also come in the mail to give a smile. Rather than the ordinary bills, flyers, and other stuff that clutter the mailbox. Eagerness awaits to see what shows up in the mail unlike others times of the year. The cards that come from family and friends creates a deep desire to send out cards as well. Whether we are aware of it or not, the holiday season changes us.

There is also a change that comes by the voice of the Gospel. It is far different from being led to spend money or to give a gesture of kindness in the mail. The Corinthians Christians were not expecting a welcome reception from the apostle Paul any time soon. When He wrote to them they were in a crisis, a fractured congregation, lax in church discipline, indifferent toward sexual sins, dealing with lawsuits, abusing Christian freedom, and having no regard for right practice with the Lord’s Supper. They were a wreck, but those opening words from St. Paul must have been surprising to hear. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is how the majority of sermons still begin today by preachers of the Gospel. The Advent of God shapes our lives with the answer of Jesus.

In having to deal with the Corinthians. It came with compassion for sinners. “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you.” Rather than turning to the topic of their sins first. St. Paul starts out by praising the free gift in Jesus. Grace or Xaris in Greek, is the undeserved favor of God. The very fact of these Christians existing in such a corrupt city as Corinth was evidence enough that it did not come from their hands. Everything rested upon Jesus. The Father gave His Son as a gift that they could never give themselves. The Holy Spirit enriched them with words of wisdom in the Son as promised by baptism. The Son established His witness among them with St. Paul as an apostle sent by the Lord. Like Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, so He made His way humbly to these Corinthians out of love for their salvation.

Thanksgiving was a time of thankfulness as a nation, but this Sunday we give thanks to the start of a new church. It provides the shape of how gracious God is by giving Jesus. Those denominations devoid of using a liturgical calendar easily get away from the Gospel, even if they have Scriptures. Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost proclaims the birth, death, resurrection, and continuing victory of God’s Son. Our life may be in doubts over sin, sadness over life, or whatever situation. Christ calls us back in repentance and faith to Him as Savior. The Church year invites us to welcome the life of Jesus once again as a free gift given for all. It holds the promise of God’s undeserved love declaring before the Last Day, “Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation” (9:9). These words of good news shape how we respond to every situation no matter how wicked. Salvation rests in the God who loves to save sinners. What He does, He does by grace in order to give, enrich, and witness the thanks we are to have for Jesus.

Even with the solid foundation of the Gospel thankfully laid by St. Paul. The Corinthian Christians were feeling inadequate. Many of their sinful problems came from trying to compete with the culture, which in turn was also changing who they were by God’s grace. So they heard, “…You are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” If they were not careful the present age would consume them with its concerns, glories, and competing interests. Only the Day of Christ and His final revealing allowed for confidence. God already gave gifts to the baptized by His grace. What they had was enough only hidden as a promise under Word and Sacrament. This grace of God (xaris) in Jesus would also provide gracious gifts (xarismata) of service as He saw fit. The Church, just as every individual, had to wait on the Lord. His gifts shaped their service.

Nobody likes to feel inferior, especially in America. Yet, Christ was a born of the Virgin Mary. He rode in on a donkey to die on a cross. He still humbles himself under small gifts of the Word and Sacrament. If this is how God works for salvation, why would He shape our lives of service to be any different? We picture St. Paul the mighty apostle with extraordinary gifts, but what He glorified was His weakness and suffering. He said, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil 3:20-21). This does not promote laziness, denial of gifts, or to look the other way when opportunity arises. However, what sustains us is the work of Christ upon our lives. Only He keeps the baptized blameless not by our gifts, but with Him as the Gift. From such grace by Word and sacrament there are gracious blessings brought forth in the lives of His saints. They will be enough for the Church. The Psalmist said, “Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.” (Psalms 25:3).

With the arrival of St. Paul’s letter, the Corinthians were to find hope in the Church. Public sin, false doctrine, and disunity spoiled it on the surface. Except, there was a deeper Spirit of love at work underneath it all. It went to the depths of a promising Word. “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” They were a church, maybe broken and embittered, arrogant and selfish, but still called together in Christ. The fellowship they shared was not from this world, not from man’s ways, but called to be together by God. This hidden glory of faith in Jesus shapes our life in the Church. It joins us as the baptized into communion with God’s Son. In turn, we have communion with each other at the deepest levels by faith in the Savior. As Rev. President Harrison declares, “The Church endures because of Christ and he will never let his Gospel go un-believed, until the end of time” (A little book on joy 164).

As we start anew, there is nothing God has started that He will not finish as promised by His Word. There is gracious forgiveness for sinners big and small. There is life in the church among the baptized with abundant gifts at the present. There is salvation secure for eternity to hold fast to this glory together as given at communion. The Advent of God shapes our lives with the answer of Jesus. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.