

112821 "Advent: Strengthen You to the End" 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a feast of four weeks in preparation for Christmas, remembering and giving thanks to the true meaning of Christmas and waiting for Jesus to come again. The word Advent comes from the Latin word 'adventus', which means 'coming' and 'to arrive'. It is a season to prepare for the coming of Christ in various meanings: the promised coming of the Messiah to the Jews, the coming of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, the promised return of the risen Christ in final victory, and the continual coming of Christ into the lives and hearts of believers.

At the end of a year, our hearts become very busy. With or without a pandemic, our minds undoubtedly become busy around this time of year. Amidst this busyness, the most important thing that we should never forget is contained in the Advent!

On Advent Sundays, the church lights a total of 4 candles, one each week. It usually consists of 3 purple candles and 1 pink candle. The purple candle lit on the first Sunday of Advent symbolizes Hope. What kind of hope can there be in our daily lives, which is disturbed by the coronavirus like today? I hope today will be a time to discover the message of hope in Paul's letter to the Corinthian church.

In the early church, not only did they experience the work of the Holy Spirit, but they also experienced many problems within the church. Of course, if you think about it in reverse, we should be able to see the presence of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, not just the problems of today.

One of the main problems the Corinthian church had was "division". At that

time, the Corinthian church was divided and conflicted due to four major divisions. First of all, there was a division regarding the leader (Some said they were for Paul, some were for Peter, some were for Christ, and so on). The second division was due to the rich members being exclusive. There was also division because of those who overemphasized the gift of tongues, and finally, they experienced division about whether it was acceptable to eat the sacrifices offered to idols. Having listed them like this, you can see they also had a lot of problems.

Now, in order to understand this problem that the Corinthian church faced, we need to look at what the social background was at the time. In ancient Greek and Roman society, people passionately pursued philosophy and rhetoric. Rhetoric is called [rhetorica] in Latin, and, as you know well, rhetoric is the study of language techniques to persuade and influence people in front of the public.

Athens changed its political landscape as it went into the 6th century BC. It was the beginning of democracy for the people as they drove out the nobility and ruled directly. When making laws or deciding important national policies, citizens came together to share opinions and vote. When there was a lawsuit, people concerned had to defend for themselves in front of the public, so if they spoke well in front of the public and the public voted for, they would protect themselves and get the public's attention. As the social environment changed like this, the ability to speak well became the main means of success. This also affected the early churches that were in the sphere of influence of Greece and Rome!

The reason why I tell you this in a lengthy way while preaching 1 Corinthians 1 is because there is a connection with the "divisions" mentioned earlier. At

the time, people's interests were naturally in finding the best teacher who spoke well. Students often argued on the strengths and weaknesses of teachers and students from different schools. In this culture, the members of the Corinthian church tried to understand their identities from a worldly point of view, and therefore, compared spiritual leaders with the standards of philosophy and rhetoric at the time, creating a discord.

Specifically, many of the Corinthian church members valued the brilliant wisdom and scholarship of human beings rather than learning the word of God without pretense and applying it to their lives. They preferred the rhetoric of Apollos rather than the simple approach of Paul. In a situation like this, Apostle Paul said in verses 4 and 7, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus... so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul told them about a life of waiting for the Lord and a life of gratitude.

No matter how many problems there are, there is always something to be thankful for. We are also in the midst of the COVID-19, but we hope that our thanks to God will not stop and dry up no matter how busy the world is. Specifically, what kind of gratitude that is, is in verse 4, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus."

There is a book called "Prison to praise" by Merlin R. Carothers. This book is a great example of how gratitude and praise can change lives. There was a young man with an alcoholic father. As with all addictions, alcoholism is not an easy problem to get out of. The mother and son prayed earnestly for the change of the father. Nevertheless, the father did not change. But instead of being resentful and discouraged, the young man decided to just be grateful.

Even if his dad drank, he was grateful that he wasn't too drunk. Even if he fell down while drinking, he was grateful that he mostly fell at home. He just started to be grateful for everything. After a while, his father asked: "When I watched TV, I heard that drug addicts have changed, can alcohol addiction change?" It meant he was ready to believe in Jesus. God was changing his father's heart while he was thankful in all circumstances.

In the Bible, people are called vessels. The value of the vessel depends on what it contains. If it contains rice, it is a rice bowl, and if it contains water, it is a water bowl. Acceptance is faith. The first thing is to accept Jesus as the Lord and Savior of our lives. But, that's not all. It is a mature belief to accept all reality as well, to praise and appreciate wherever you are.

God's grace to you in Jesus! Again, God's grace to you in Jesus! There is the grace of God that we experience through Jesus even today. In these days, because of the coronavirus, the businesses are still difficult, our hearts are heavy, and there are many obstacles in our lives. Is God's grace still in these times? Yes, it is! Looking back over the past two years, some families have experienced the amazing work of God's healing. That's God's grace and God's presence!

Even during this time, there was a young man that God blessed in the hope of the Lord even though he was preparing for the exam in this difficult time and he was passing through a dark tunnel. Even though business is difficult, there are families now experiencing those long-awaited problems being solved one by one. "God's grace to you in Jesus!" Friends, are you waiting for Jesus? If so, God's grace and God's presence will surely follow!

As we face the first Sunday of Advent, I bless you to "Wait for the appearing

of our Lord Jesus Christ" even during the tribulation and storm of Covid19. Through this kind of thanksgiving, hope, and waiting, as the apostle Paul said in verse 8, "He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." I bless you that this promised word will come true in your life.

"It is beautiful to the God who calls you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord." Here, "fellowship" means [koinonia] in Greek, meaning to participate. If so, fellowship with Jesus Christ is to share in all of Him. Christians are said to be a part of Christ's death by faith, now part of His life through the Holy Spirit, and finally part of His glory to come.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, we have reached the first Sunday of Advent. The reason we can still hope is because there is God's grace to experience in Jesus Christ. Our lives today are still busy, but let's wait for the coming of the Lord. I hope and pray that you will experience God's presence in gratitude. And I pray that you stand firmly until the end of the day. Fairfield Grace, May God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.