

1st S of Advent (Dec 3, 2023) SM, SJ

1 Corinthians 1:3-9 (NIV2011) Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Twice already this morning you have heard these same words. You heard them in our second scripture reading and then you just them again, because many Lutheran pastors – including me – have generally pronounced a blessing on the congregation prior to beginning the sermon. You heard me give that familiar blessing just moments ago: **Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Today, we heard those words as they were given by God through the pen of the Apostle Paul. They were originally applied to the Christians of Corinth long ago, but as we will hear today, it is just as true that:

- Grace and Peace Are Yours
1. As God blesses us in Christ
2. As he anchors us in faith

1. As God blesses us in Christ

As we realize that December 25 and the birth of Jesus is approaching, Scripture doesn't draw our attention to presents for each other, but God's present to us. **Grace to you**, Paul writes.

The Greek word for **grace** is *χαρις* (charis) – God's free, undeserved love and favor. It's a present, God's gift to us. Grace is not something we have coming to us. It's not like our paychecks or a high school diploma, earned through hard labor. It's an undeserved gift present that Paul explains is given us only **in Christ**.

When the original language uses the word "in," it has the idea of being within something and not outside of it. For example, if we were looking for our keys "in the house," that clearly says that they are within the walls of the house but not outside the house.

In Christ teaches us that the gifts of God which we receive through God's grace come to us only and exclusively through God's Son, Jesus. Forgiveness, adoption into God's family, eternal life, peace with God, these blessings come only to people **in Christ**.

God blessed the Corinthians **in every way**. It has totally changed them. Before Paul came to them and taught them about Jesus, they had been unbelievers, heathen people who cared nothing for God, and were ignorant of God. But now they were changed **in every way**, as was especially evident in their speech and knowledge. They no longer talked like unbelievers; they no longer lived or thought or talked like unbelievers.

All of this is also true for us, just as it was for the Corinthians. God's blessings are a gift of pure grace, given us only **in Christ**. In his life, in his suffering and death, in his resurrection, God gives us his blessings. Like the Corinthians, we have been changed by God's grace in every aspect of our lives, We talk, think and live not as the unbelieving world, but as redeemed, sanctified children of God.

With all these spiritual gifts that God has poured out on us by grace, we **eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed**. During the season of Advent, we not only are preparing for Christ's first coming at the manger of Bethlehem, we are also preparing for his second coming on the Last Day.

So because of God's gift to us of faith, we're excited, and we're looking forward to it with great anticipation. The same Lord Jesus who came to be our Savior is going to come again and take us to be with him forever in heaven!

2. As he anchors us in faith

God gives us his grace and peace as he keeps us and preserves us in faith.

The picture here is of an anchor. The purpose of an anchor is to make sure that the ship doesn't move, that it stays where it is. God keeps us, he anchors us where we are. He keeps us connected to Christ by faith,

God keeps us rooted in the faith **firm to the end**. It's possible that Paul means until the end of our earthly lives, but it may be more likely he means until the end of the world, until Judgment Day. Either way, our gracious God keeps us, his people, anchored to our Savior we finally receive the goal of our faith, eternal life in heaven.

To make certain that we remain attached and connected firmly to Christ, *keeps* us is so that we **will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ**.

There will be no charge of sin that sticks to us. Christ makes us like Teflon; everything slides off of us and nothing sticks to us. And again, we are reminded that this is by God's free, undeserved love and mercy. It is God's gift to us in Christ. We are blameless because Christ has removed our sins, purifying us with his holy precious blood and replacing our sins with his own holiness and righteousness. So when our Lord Jesus returns, he will find us to have no sin, because he himself has removed our sins by his cross.

God is faithful - God keeps his promises. We can be absolute certain that God will do exactly as he has said he would. The promise that God has made us to keep is guaranteed to us by the faithfulness of God.

Have you ever looked at some people and thought how one person doesn't deserve the other? Perhaps because of an affair, or bad treatment, lies or just never being there for the other person, while the other person is always there, never lies, has always been faithful.

So it is with God. We do not deserve God or his blessings. We are often unfaithful. We are often "not there" for God. Yet God is always there for us. He is always faithful, even when we have not been.

Grace and Peace to you - those words are not a vague, hopeful wish. God's grace and peace are his precious gifts to us in his one and only Son, sealed in Christ's blood. God's grace and peace are ours, among God's many, many blessings to us, pouring out in good and necessary spiritual gift, anchoring and keeping us blameless until our Savior comes again. And as we wait, let us remember that God always will be there for us, our faithful anchor today and forever. Amen.