

# Faithnews

From Your Pastor



“Be still and know that God is with you. Yes. You.”



## Hope & Fasting

I Corinthians 1:3-9

11/29/2020

*<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*<sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— <sup>6</sup> just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—*

*<sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

It's an Advent/Christmas like we've never seen in our

past. None of our personal memories include a perfect storm of politics, race relations and global pandemic. We could handle the first one or two. Add a pandemic of global proportions? Whoa!

What I like about Paul is how kind and supportive he can be. What I don't like about him is his anger. He could cut even the most arrogant down to size. And he does it quite well in this letter to the fledgling church in Corinth.

He begins the letter with much love and gratitude. Lovely phrases leap off the page: “the grace of God that has been given you in Jesus Christ”; “enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind”; “the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you”; “strengthen you to the end so that you may be blameless.”

The thing is, they aren't blameless. They argue over whose spiritual gifts are the greatest; they refuse to work together in harmony; even Communion was highjacked away from the poor.

If I've learned anything up to this point, it's that, "the more things change, the more they remain the same." Christ's church is still trying to figure things out. We argue over points of theology, how to worship, what the Christian life looks like. We've been arguing since Christ's resurrection.

Through 2,000 years of history, we've finally managed to figure a few things out. We have broken up into denominations, only to reunite later. We still disagree on theology and who is included in grace. I suspect we'll continue the struggle until Christ returns.

And for that we say, "Jesus, you are late!"

What Paul is giving thanks for is that the Corinthians

have been gifted by God. They have something worthwhile to argue about.

And so do we.

Sometimes we get it just right. Sometimes we don't. Our faith is dynamic and we're meant to be open to God's call to grow spiritually.

So what does all this have to do with the Season of Advent? When do we get to talk about Christmas and the baby in the manger and shepherds and angels?



The Season of Advent is a time of preparation. We prepare ourselves to greet the child in the manger and the resurrected Lord when he returns. It's a season marked with watchfulness.

While we watch for Christ's return, we also acknowledge that God has ripped open the heavens and come down. We have felt the fires burning and trembling and shaking. Over and over again history proves to us that God makes straight with a crooked line, that God levels the mountains and the valleys.

How do we live out our lives and our faith in this new Season of Advent with a Pandemic that has shut down our world and disordered our lives? First, we give thanks, just as Paul does in his opening words to the Church at Corinth. There is a lot to be thankful for. We can acknowledge the blessings of life and belongings. And we can go deeper, thanking Christ for his enriching and transforming of ourselves. We give thanks for what understanding we have and what we'll receive in good time.

We lack in nothing, because it's Christ who provides us. We didn't go out and find it for ourselves. We didn't buy and pay for it, Jesus did. We can't take credit for the gifts and talents we possess, we give thanks that God chose us to receive them.

Second, we acknowledge that maybe this Christmas will be one of fasting. Yes, fasting. Just like Lent. Maybe this is the year we don't shop until we drop, even on the internet. Maybe this is the year, we celebrate more simply, worship more simply and welcoming Christ with a single lit candle in the window.

Our Advent Fast can see us sinking into the hope of the gifts with which Christ endows: Knowledge of Jesus and his teachings, spiritual gifts for discernment; strength to stand fast against the odds.

What is your greatest hope this season?

## Hope's Solid Foundation

For Christians, our foundation is Jesus, our sure hope amid life's uncertainties. While Advent is a time of anticipation and waiting, it also represents the fulfillment of Jesus' promised birth and the certainty of his promised return. Jesus — the hope of nations — says he's preparing a place for us and coming back for us (see John 14:2-3).

Because our hope's foundation is guaranteed "according to the Lord's word" (1 Thessalonians 4:15, NIV), we don't have to live like people "who have no hope" (verse 13).

Praise God!

What do you seek from God? Seek it out. Allow the noise and trappings of Christmas to be diminished, if only for a short time.

Be still and know that God is with you. Yes. You.

Be still and know that your hope in God is not unfounded.

Be still and know that God is providing, that God is faithful. You do nothing to earn it. Reach out and grab hold of it.

For in that lies our hope.

All glory and honor be to God. **Amen.**



## Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is a symbol of watchfulness and increasing joy as we anticipate Jesus' birth.

The wreath's circular shape symbolizes eternity, or life without end.

The candles remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World — he brought light and life to a dark world (see John 1:4-5).

On each of the four Sundays of Advent, we light a new candle.

As the light grows, so do our hope and joy.

