

Sunday 29 November 2020

# Advent 1

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*A time of thanksgiving*

God, we come to you in our waiting.

We wait with our fears,  
our anxieties and frustrations,  
our pains and regrets,  
our shame and confusion.

God, help us to wait in peace.

During this time of waiting, as we look forward to celebrating Christ's coming among us, we reflect on what God has done, is doing, and has still to do as he fulfils his promises to us.

<sup>3</sup> You did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

<sup>4</sup> From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him. (Isaiah 64:3f)

The weeks before Christmas are always hectic, and this year, with all the strangeness that comes with the covid pandemic, things are already more hectic than usual. So I chose to pause and re-centre my thoughts, focusing once again on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Throughout this Advent we will be following the readings found in the Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings. You will find these listed on our website. Today we turn to some words of Paul.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind - just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you - so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:3-9)

In these seven verses Paul names Jesus five times, plus one further reference to him by his title, Christ, alone. In opening his letter in this way it almost appears that Paul is obsessed with Jesus! We've all met people like that. No matter what you start talking to them about, they always seem to turn the conversation around to their favourite sport, politician, music, whatever. It is their passion. There is no doubt, Paul is passionate about Jesus, and he wants others to share in his passion. In this letter Paul is writing to a young church beset by the ordinary problems of following Jesus in a world that had other priorities and principles. To make sense of it all, Paul tells them, they have to put Jesus at the centre. Jesus is not simply another factor to be taken into account - he is the one who gives meaning and shape to all the rest.

In this opening part of his letter Paul covers the whole of life, the past (what the Corinthians once were), the present (what they are right now) and the future (what they have yet to become). Their whole life is bound up in Christ. What is more, God has given them all they need to live this re-focused life. Paul is not giving them a moral code and telling them this is a good way to try and live (as many of today's gurus and motivational speakers do), he presents to his readers the possibility of new life - what we cannot do for ourselves, God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

And what, the average Corinthian might ask, is this going to cost me? The answer is shocking: nothing at all! All this, Paul says, is through the kindness and goodwill of God, his grace. God loved them and acted decisively on their behalf even though they had done nothing whatever to deserve it, but rather the opposite. God has called them in the past, God equips them in the present and God will complete the process in the future.

So with our eyes focused on Jesus and our hands and hearts open to God's gracious gift we wait. And as we wait we pray, giving thanks to God for his indescribable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15).

*Pause and pray*

As we wait we recall Jesus' words:

Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: keep awake. (Mark 13:33-37)

And as we wait may we know the peace of God this Advent.

May I be filled with peace, Lord,  
because you sent your Son to rescue me,  
because Jesus is the centrepiece of everything.

May the peace I have  
be life-transforming,  
be infectious,  
be the driving force behind everything I do and say.

Amen.