

## Grace and Peace for Advent

✠ **Rich in eager waiting** (vv.3-7)

✠ **Safe in Jesus' keeping** (vv.8-9)

In the name of Jesus, our royal Savior whose Advent we celebrate, dearly redeemed saints of God:

The last time I worked on this text was two weeks ago last Thursday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, Martin Luther's birthday. I was far from Germany, in fact, in that place we used to joke about as children "digging a hole all the way to China." Come to find out, the Chinese make the same joke about America. Wednesday evening I had been informed by Seminary President, Rev. Wong, and it was confirmed Thursday morning at breakfast that I needed a rest. So I would not be teaching until afternoon. Back in my room I was just settling in for a rather boring morning when a knock on the door revealed one of the Coworkers. "Pastor Ge (wife of Rev. Wong) says, 'Come to the Seminary and teach.'" To my question came the one word answer, "Change," i.e., there's been a change in plans, no need to change back into teaching clothes. "This is China," Eileen smiled. Mary Ge decided her husband was wrong that I needed to rest my voice from seven hours of teaching each day. But I did not know until hustling half a mile to the Seminary what I would be teaching. Setting up my projector, Mary pointed to these opening verses of 1 Corinthians. In a few minutes the Chinese in a new class of Juniors were reading their first Greek sentences off the screen, repeating after me just as they do for the English. **Grace and Peace for Advent.**

✠ **Rich in eager waiting** (vv.3-7)

The warmth of Paul's greeting to the Corinthians ought to make even the most depressed and downhearted among us perk up like a cup of hot chocolate on a snowy day. This ought to warm your heart like the first glass of white wine with turkey and loved ones who are not "turkeys." It ought to feel like the down comforter that defies the winter wind howling past your windows. This warm greeting is absolutely amazing. The Chinese students laughed when I told them, but it's true. If there were a supermarket where you could buy every conceivable congregational problem, each and every label would not read, *Made in America*, or *Made in China*, but *Made in Corinth*. Corinth caused more problems for the Lord's Apostle Paul than all his other congregations combined. And how does he greet them? Not at alligators, but, "***Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***"

Ah, but would he greet us so warmly in Jesus' name? Don't I have to look back on another week of unloving thoughts, words and deeds on my part? Haven't I forgotten the needs of others because I get so fixated on my own? Where is the love and thankfulness that ought to flow through my thoughts about my coworkers? Why does resentment pop up quicker in my heart than an ice fisherman's rod marker? What about my relatives whom I ought to love as warmly as my heavenly Father loves them? Peace often seems as far from my heart as the sunshine missing on a Minnesota morning. And the reason is simple. I keep trying to be the lord of my own life instead of honoring Jesus Christ as my Lord, my Advent King.

But this is exactly why I love Him. He first loved me knowing my sins far better than I can ever grasp their gravity. I am so evil by nature that only the blood of God's own Son could cleanse away my guilt. And you ought to admit it too. God owes us nothing but wrath and punishment for just one failure to love as we've been loved or to forgive as we've been forgiven. But the list of our sins is like an endless scroll that starts at the altar of holy God and runs in fine print past the doors of life to hell. But Jesus' cross is God's delete key on every crime of ours. **Grace and Peace** are just what we need and exactly what we receive because Christ, our Advent King, came the first time and keeps coming in Word and sacraments. His one last promise to fulfill is to come again. This makes us **Rich in eager waiting**.

*“I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”*

God says we lack nothing of the Holy Spirit’s gifts, but there seem to be many Christians in America and China of the Pentecostal / Charismatic stripe who disagree with God on this. In China the government sometimes sends teachers seminaries did not chose. One showed up in Wuhan to teach the students how to “speak in tongues.” The dogmatics professor reacted exactly like one of our New Life members: “How can you teach a gift?” I agreed and added that “tongues” in the Bible is always “other languages,” not gibberish. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is actually putting a damper on “tongue-speaking” by requiring an interpreter in order to build up the church. That’s what saved the seminary in Wuhan. The professor politely declined to interpret for the visiting Pentecostal, then informed the other teachers that they did not have time either. We trust God the Holy Spirit to keep manifesting His presence among us not only by working faith through the hearing of God’s Word, but also by giving the gifts we need to carry out Christ’s Great Commission in this part of His harvest field. We will keep praying for the workers and teachers in a Pre-school, for Sunday School teachers and staff to direct our Children’s Christmas Service, for volunteers to call on our straying members and unbelieving neighbors. And when we pray, God will open our eyes with the joyful surprise that He has already given us the resources of people and money. We too are **Rich in eager waiting** for Christ’s second and final coming, truly...

### † **Safe in Jesus’ keeping (vv.8-9)**

Christ *“will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”* More literally, *“Faithful is God through whom you were called into common-union of His Son Jesus Christ, the Lord of ours.”* Our biggest mistake as Christians is trying to trust our own strength, our own character or our own faith to keep us close to God. It is not by ringing tears from our eyes at night or making ourselves suffer the agony of Christ on the cross. Safety comes because of Christ’s agony to fulfill all God’s promises, made from eternity before we were around to feel or decide anything. God is the faithful One and He alone can keep us **Safe** on the pathway home to heaven until Christ comes again.

But how does He do this? Is there some light socket out there where you can stick your finger, zap your soul, and get fired up for Christ? Can you find safety in exciting congregations where everyone seems to be so alive even if the theology is a mile wide and an inch deep? Do you look for the preachers that make you feel good about yourself or the Christians with the fancy cars and fine homes that make Christianity seem so successful from a financial standpoint? **Faithful** is the key word for **fellowship** with God, not our feeble, fumbling attempts to be faithful to Him, but His unbounded, unbridled love and faithfulness which makes awesome promises, then keeps them one by one even at the cost of His own shed blood and His own personal suffering and death. This is the faithfulness of God the Holy Spirit in His Word and sacraments that warms our hearts when we see it in fellow Christians.

During the first break that Thursday morning I looked across the courtyard at some of the Seniors who had been studying Genesis with me the three days previous. I wondered why they looked so sad and forlorn. Soon Mary Ge told me they were complaining that their teacher was taken from them. This was not for personal reasons because this teacher has nothing to offer except Christ-crucified and risen. But that’s what these students wanted, more of our Savior’s **Grace and Peace for Advent**. Permission was granted, and soon members of the Senior class were crowding into the last remaining seats or bringing their own to study with Juniors and pastors from the area.

No matter which side of the globe on which you find yourself today, Jesus is here to keep you **Safe**, eagerly **waiting** for the eternal Christmas of His Second Coming. What a great reason to give thanks to God for all His **Grace and Peace for Advent**. Give thanks in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

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