

Isaiah 6:44:1-9; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

Grace and peace to you from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen

Many of you know that recently I went Florida to visit my folks. I took along my handy-dandy, ever popular hand-held computer. Because I am of course a gadget geek and I needed one of these toys, excuse me, I mean one of these *tools*, to have with me all of the time. As I was preparing to go, I discovered that there was a new piece of software that I felt need to have for my hand-held computer. When I went to purchase that software, I found that the operating system on my hand-held computer is incompatible with it. But, I have to have that important, absolutely essential, piece of software! (O.K., it is something so I can watch movies on my handheld computer) But I *really* need that piece of software on my hand-held computer because it is an important part of my daily existence!

Since it won't work on this model of my 2½ year-old computer, then obviously I need to have a new one, that this piece of software that I absolutely, positively have to have, will work on. So I started shopping. Dad and I went to Circuit City, Comp USA and Staples, and I got online and I was trying to figure out exactly what it was that I needed in my newest and latest and greatest hand-held computer, because I absolutely have to have one of these things. I got magazines and I am reading them and I am really anticipating getting this new hand-held computer - except then, I looked at the price of the ones that I absolutely had to have and realized that I am going to have my current hand-held computer for a while longer. But I was really enjoying all of the research that I am doing. I often think that I enjoy the shopping almost as much, if not even more, than the purchase. I think that is something that all humans have in common. The fact that we can anticipate something. For good or for bad, the ability to anticipate (and I realize that everyone over the age of 30 is now singing in their head the Carly Simon song, but that's O.K).

The reason that I am talking about anticipation is because, like I said, it is something that humans have in common. It's not just humans in the 21st century, but as we look at our lessons this morning, especially the lessons to the Corintinians, Paul, in his opening lines of his letter to the Corinthians, is anticipating. He is anticipating a couple of things. First of all, he is anticipating what the reaction of the Corinthians themselves, the congregation there in Corinth, is going to be as he continues to write to them. Second, and perhaps more importantly throughout his letter, he is anticipating the return of Jesus.

Paul has known the congregation there in Corinth for at least three years. They had a well-established relationship and they valued his opinion. The Corinthians, however, the congregation there in Corinth, they were having a bit of a problem. They were made up more of Gentile believers, than of former Jewish believers, so they were still struggling to get over that idol worshiping thing they were into. There were various factions within the congregation, and some are boasting, some are being very haughty, as Paul puts it. There is condescension and disdain going on; inconsideration of others within the congregation; people being ignored on purpose or being shoved out of the way. There is even the whole little sexual immorality problem going on that he has to address very specifically. Paul is really ticked off at these folks. Because they know better!

So, Paul wants to chastise and wants to correct them. Instead of chastising them, instead of starting this letter off as I may well have if I was ticked off, let's look in verse 4 in our lesson this morning. Paul starts off his letter with "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the

grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus.” When I am ticked off at someone I don’t say that “Thank you God for this person” (I got one of those notices from my Credit Union that said I have overdrafts and they whopped me with way too many charges. I want to write them a letter, but can’t do that yet, because I am still so angry with them - or perhaps with myself - that I can’t put polite words on paper). Paul says, “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus.” Paul responds to the congregation in Corinth - not in anger and harsh words; he responds to them in grace, with patience, and with love.

Not only is Paul trying to get them to address these internal issues, he is looking at life in the broader sense, for Paul’s second issue is that Christ is coming, and Christ is coming soon. It is the second coming of Christ that is part of the celebration that we have in this season of Advent (Now I do find that here in the States, many of us are far interested in the Christmas celebrations, than we are in exactly what Christmas is all about. This may be a little bit distressing to some of us, not to say that I have anything against Black Friday. I would have well been involved in the celebration of Black Friday, and getting up at 4:30 a.m. to be Staples at 5:00 when the doors opened, but I got voted down by my family and the before mentioned problem with my credit union!) I really enjoy Christmas music. I like the decorations and I find that people are far more friendlier when they are out shopping when they are out shopping then during other times of the year, but I do think that Christmas has been corrupted by our society. I mean, it was even Halloween and at my local Giant we had the red and green candy down the center aisle. They shoved all the Halloween candy out the door. How many malls in the middle of October were putting up Christmas decorations already? We have Santas that are out numbering nativity scenes. I also have to interject upon myself and I have to say that I am in favor of our government not endorsing one religion over another.

To get back to Paul: Paul is anticipating Jesus’ return. He figured it is going to happen definitely in his life time, definitely before he dies, and probably a whole lot sooner than that. So, he wants himself, he wants the congregation in Corinth, to be ready. In Vs. 7 he says to them, “So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He continues, “He has also strengthened you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Get ready, be prepared! That is what Paul is telling the congregation in Corinth. Jesus is coming. Soon.

So, as Paul has told the congregation in Corinth, as we heard in our Gospel lesson this morning, no one knows exactly when. Jesus didn’t return before Paul died. He may well return before we die, may not come for another 10,000 years. **When** he returns is not what is important here. What is important is that we live our lives to be ready. To be ready for his return. Not to be ready in the sense of biological weapon attack, or terrorist attack, but to be ready for the return of our Messiah.

That is what Advent is about. Being ready. Getting prepared. The definition of Advent is the coming or arrival, especially, of something extremely important. So during this season of Advent, be prepared for two separate, but very related events. Be prepared for the celebration and joyous arrival of the Baby Jesus, and we prepare for the return of our Messiah, the Christ. So this day, get ready!

Amen.