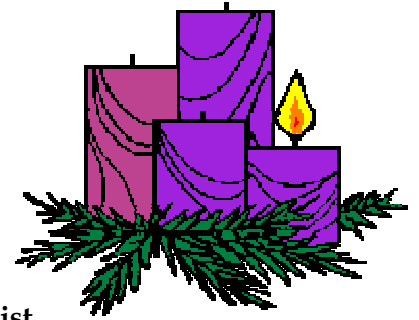


St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
November 30, 2008 Advent 1 1 Corinthians 1:3-9



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

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Gifted! What a wondrous concept – to be gifted! Some people think you are gifted – if you have a really high IQ! Some people who are supposed to be really smart – say IQ is way over rated. That the whole question of intellectual giftedness is far more complicated than the grade on a test. While at first a person might think – if only I could be intellectually gifted – I would get 100% on all my homework and all my tests – I would get straight A+s on all my report cards. And then I would be really happy and really successful! And then you read that lots of people who are really intellectually gifted are not very happy! Sometimes they suffer from imaginative and intellectual and emotional over-excitability! It's like somebody is tickling you all the time. It's like when something is so funny – you laugh until it literally hurts and you can't stop laughing! Really gifted people can feel isolated – because nobody else seems to understand or care about all the things they think about! They can suffer from perfectionism. If they can't get everything perfect – absolutely perfect – what were they thinking? They might as well give up – because they made such a stupid mistake – that ruins everything! They can suffer from underachievement. Maybe they can't throw a football a hundred yards – or can't run very fast. If they aren't fast – they must be slow – as slow as a turtle. And maybe they suffer from depression – that terrible feeling that they are going down the drain in the bathtub – and all they can feel is this terrible around and around and down and down – into this huge sucking hole and everything is utterly hopeless! It is a most powerful comfort from the Gospel – that by the grace of God:

We Are Gifted!

- 1. We have been enriched in every way**
- 2. We don't lack any spiritual gift**
- 3. We are strong to the end!**

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on this morning – from the Apostle Paul's first letter to the believers in the Greek city of Corinth. It is tempting to think that congregations where the Apostle Paul preached were places where everything went very smoothly. After all – if St. Paul himself – taught in the wilderness Seminary as a class of one by the Lord Jesus himself – was your pastor – everything would be perfect wouldn't it? And yet – if you read all 16 chapters of 1st Corinthians you find Paul addressing all kinds of terrible problems! There were factions – cliques – divisions in the congregation. Some people said, "I like Paul best!" Some said, "I like Apollos best. He is the most gifted speaker. I could listen to him forever!" Some said, "I like Cephas – Simon Peter best! Now there is a man with passion. He even walked

on water! Did you know that?" And some people said, "I for one – follow Jesus! That's who I follow – the Savior – not some fisherman or some fancy talker or some former Pharisee – who had to be smacked off his horse – to stop persecuting the Church!" Paul reminded them – when he first came there – he gave them spiritual milk---because like little babies – that's all they were ready for. But they needed to spiritually grow up! They needed to move on – to mature – to have kind of ground up – kind of chunky food – then little bits of food they could eat with their fingers – and finally to keep growing till they were having Biblical Scriptural prime rib and lobster and poppy seed torte! Paul reminded them – some pastors plant the seeds of the Gospel – some pastors water – and other pastors come when the harvest is – when souls are gathered home to Heaven. Pastors plant and water and harvest. Only the Holy Spirit can make seeds grow! There was trouble in Corinth – sins with hugs and kisses. They thought that being tolerant of sins against the 6th commandment meant they were somehow sophisticated – open minded and tolerant. It was wrong! Paul preached a blunt crushing law. And then a sweet Gospel of unconditional forgiveness – full and complete! **Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

The part of 1st Corinthians we are concentrating on begins with familiar words: **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** Grace is undeserved love. Only Jesus can see deep inside our hearts – and see all the ugliness we are capable of. Oh, our behavior might be every so nice, kind and polite on the outside – while on the inside we have thoughts that are angry and ugly and disgusting and hurtful and wrong! Sometimes it's scary – when you think of all the bad stuff you would do – if you could just be – I don't know – about 80% sure you wouldn't get caught. Sometimes – when we do get caught – are we really sorry for what we did – or really sorry we got caught? Jesus knows all our weaknesses – our shortcomings – our failures and mistakes. And still – he loves and forgives us. That's grace – sweet and simple. Because of God's grace we have peace. Peace is a child-like calm and confidence – that Jesus will always take very good care of us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who will keep us safe from the wolves. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has promised no one will snatch us away from his hand. Jesus' is the Good Shepherd who loves his sheep so much – he will lay down his life to save us!

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. In Jesus you have been enriched. Enrichment – richness is a gift! It's something that has been given to you as a gift. You don't earn it. You don't deserve it. It's a gift! There are all kinds of gifts. When we are little – we aren't afraid to try all kinds of things. We aren't afraid to do art. We draw and paint and color and even sculpt things. But somewhere along the way we get discouraged. Somebody says something pretty thoughtless and rude – about how something we drew or painted or built is stupid – and they laugh at us and we get discouraged and we quit. When was the last time you drew something or painted something or sculpted something. I love to draw things in confirmation class – and coloring! Have you colored lately? Some people are gifted at cooking. A lady at our Dundee Church – Grandma Benson – was the first lady to put pudding in a cake mix. You could do that! You could cook stuff. You could cook stuff – and just one of the best aspects of that is – don't put in any ingredient you don't like! Just put in lots of stuff that you really do like! Daddys can cook all kinds of stuff on the grill – even in the winter! Push the grill

out just a little way into the driveway – and cook baby back ribs – and smear on Sweet Baby Ray’s sauce with a brush. You can play instruments! Lots of people took piano lessons – but then they didn’t want to practice – and they don’t play now. I know a little grandma who always wanted to play the piano. She started lessons when she was 83. She started when she was 83 and practiced a lot. And before you know it – she was really good! You can do almost anything – if you use the gifts Jesus gave you – and practice. That’s faithfulness! That’s good stewardship – to use the gifts Jesus gives you – to show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control – that give all glory to God. Jesus gives us these gifts to cultivate – to glorify him!

Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. Spiritual gifts are fruits of faith. They are all about attitude and actions that spring from them. On Friday morning – a worker at the Wal-Mart in New York was literally trampled to death at 5 in the morning! They say shoppers – literally took the doors off the hinges – to burst in to be the first to buy Christmas presents. They say some 2,000 shoppers burst into the store. They trampled this worker to death! Can you imagine it? Pushing him down – so he cracked his head. Stepping on him – stomping on him. Can you imagine people so selfish – so greedy – so cold and hard – they would murder another human being to get what? Some flat screen HD TV – a Wii – a video game? It gets worse! There was a lady 28 years old – with a baby in her tummy. These same people pushed her aside – knocked her down – pushed and shoved her out of the way! How can this happen – and all in the name of the birth of the Christ child? I had thought maybe – just maybe – if the economy is so terrible – if people are struggling to pay their mortgage – if people are worried about their jobs – then just maybe people will have Christmas about the Christ child – instead of expensive electronic gifts and presents! That maybe this year – people would focus on the only Christmas present that really matters – the Christ child. But not in New York!

Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. We have so much! And I don’t just mean things and stuff. We have so much! On the Internet – they always have these collections of incredible pictures. There was a picture of a Congolese child eating flour – white and yellow powder and dust – from ground up corn and grain. Have you ever been that hungry? Have you ever been so without food – that you would count yourself fortunate to find a place on a road – a place on a path where a sack of flour had been torn – and some flour had fallen out onto the ground. And you were so hungry – that you sat on the ground and put the flour in your mouth? I saw a picture of a man well dressed and obviously well nourished stealing a whole bag of ground grain – ground up corn and flour – a whole bag full of it. And behind him – was a child – literally skin and bones – crawling behind him – literally starving to death. And this man simply walks away – with food for himself! How could you take a picture of that – and not put down your camera and tell that person – you simply cannot take that food for yourself – and let that child die? How could you stand there and let that child die? How can we eat all the food we have – while people in our world are literally starving and do nothing about it? How can we let people starve spiritually – and do nothing about that? Is that not even worse? The next weeks and months are a wondrous time to share the Christmas and then Good Friday and Easter Gospel. These next weeks – when people you love come over to see your Christmas tree – put a cookie in their one hand and a cup of egg nog or hot cider in their other hand. Then literally walk them over to your little nativity scene and tell them with gentleness and humility and patience – what does this mean? It means baby Jesus is the Son of God – born into this sinful world to die on a cross to save us! Tell them from now through Epiphany – the wise men and Jesus’ miracles. Tell them through

Lent—up to Jerusalem to die to redeem us. Tell them Holy Week—Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and Easter—He is risen! Jesus is risen indeed! Sins forgiven and Heaven won by grace alone for Jesus' sake!

He (Jesus) 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. Blameless on judgment day—is what we will be because Jesus has forgiven all our sins. That's what Christmas is about! It's not about the 15 most popular toys at Toys R'Us!—*the 50s Diner* you can buy for little children for Christmas. It's not about the griddle pan and coffee pot that sizzle and gurgle—the catsup and mustard and spatula—the jukebox that plays 3 different 50's songs. It's about baby Jesus born to save us from our sins. Christmas is not about the Eyeclips night vision infrared stealth goggles. It's about Jesus who can see into our heart—and see all our thoughts. It's about our Heavenly Father who sees us through the filter of Jesus' forgiving love—so all our sins are gone. Christmas is not about Star Wars games on a Wii. It's about the Son of God—who crushed the devil—so we are heirs of eternal life!

He 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. Strong to the end! Edna Parker passed away the day before Thanksgiving. Edna was 115 years 220 days old. She was the oldest person in the whole wide world. But Edna passed away, too! Edna was physically strong. She was a teacher—who married her childhood sweet heart. When she got married she quit teaching—to take care of her husband—cooking for him and up to 12 men working on their farm. Edna lived some 70 years as a widow! She lived in their farm house all by herself until she was 100! Edna lived the better part of 116 years. Her time of grace was exceedingly long. I wonder if she knew Jesus was her Savior. I wonder if she knew that Jesus died to wash away all our sins. I wonder if Edna knew the Christmas good news that Christ the Savior was born. The Advent good news—Christ the King is coming on Judgment Day to judge the living and the dead. Prepare your heart to meet him! Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schaller