

"Longing"

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:3-10

May God the Father, who has carried you safely through another church year, continue in the new Church Year to sustain, protect, preserve and bless each of you in the one true saving faith, in Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, long is usually better than short. From earliest childhood we learn (usually the hard way) that a little too much or a few too many is usually better than not quite enough. It doesn't take a lad too many trips up and down the rickety steps of his tree house to figure out that he might just as well take the whole can of nails up the first time, even if he doesn't think he'll need them all. Nor does it take a carpenter long to discover that he can get away with cutting a board too long many times, but that he can only cut it too short once. Day after day the lesson is learned by the fisherman who runs out of bait, the seamstress who trims off a little too much material, and the cook who just needs one more cup of flour. Long on the count is most often better than short.

And these are just the minor things. As frustrating as it is to run short of nails, flour, or cloth, it is still only a frustration. An airplane pilot cannot afford to take such chances with his fuel, nor can a soldier or police officer afford to get caught short on ammunition.

The point here is that once again an everyday lesson in life finds its way into our faith lives. Even the most serious of these cases can't begin to compare to getting caught short *spiritually*. The worst that man can do to a faithful child of God here on this earth is to end his life, in which case we fall asleep in the Lord Jesus (not a bad position to be in when you think about it). However to get caught short *spiritually* has eternal consequences. The thought of coming up short in the hour of spiritual need is – or ought to be – profoundly disconcerting and decidedly unacceptable.

The critical time period is, therefore, between this moment and the end of our time of grace, and the critical question is how we can remain in the faith that we now have, so that we are not found faithless on the Day of Judgment.

As we pause for a moment this morning on this first Sunday of the Church Year to take stock of what is truly important, it is altogether fitting and right that we come to terms with the fact that coming up short in the day of spiritual need is simply not an option. We make this self-

examination at this time because now is the time to prepare. Now is the time to make ready. Now is the time to act. One of the truths we will learn is that the key to not coming up short is, in part, to take the long view, and to learn to cling to the right sort of longing. The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is found in Paul's First Letter to the Church in Corinth, the First Chapter:

ESV 1 Corinthians 1:3-10 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ ¶ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge-- ⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you-- ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹⁰ ¶ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.*

This is God's Word. It is therefore our only guide, our only anchor in this evil world where we must live out our days. Mindful that our only sure and certain comfort and joy can be found in these words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

How many times can you scare the pants off of someone in a short period of time? Once, right? Because after that one time they are ready for it, expecting it. To startle that person again you have to wait for a bit until they are again lulled into that state of non-expectation. Is it possible to startle or frighten someone so many times that they become immune to it? Maybe, but then you usually create a different phenomenon. Here's an example. How many times have you heard the opening lines of our text: **"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"?** Probably often enough that you really *don't* hear it any longer. You hear it, but you *don't hear* it; that is, you no longer consider what it means or what the Holy Spirit is saying to you in those verbally inspired words of Holy Scripture. In fact it gets to the point where you have to stop and consciously reevaluate just what the Holy Spirit through Paul means by those words to get anything out of them.

Apply all of this to the general theme for this morning's service (the start of another church year and the reminder to look forward to Christ's Second Coming) and it all begins to make a bit more sense. Reminding someone to be "ready for Christ's return" is a good thing; and yet doing so too often can numb us to the reality of the thing. Hearing, we don't hear – and that's the dangerous time, the time when we stop longing and are most in danger of falling short.

How then do we do the one without also doing the other? How do we warn both ourselves and others without deadening both ourselves and others to the reality of that vital truth? It bears repeating that the one thing that we cannot do in life – the one thing that is absolutely unacceptable – is to stand faithless before our God on Judgment Day. If you and I fail in virtually every other thing in life, and yet depart this world as a faithful child of God, we lack nothing. We possess all.

The answer that we gain from our text for this morning is to opt for long rather than short – and that long view involves growth. The key is growth – in both your faith and in your knowledge of God's Word and will. Think of it this way. Can you ever imagine a scenario where on Judgment Day you will wish you had spent less time in God's Word, less time exposing your soul to the source of power identified by God himself as that which both creates and preserves saving faith? While coming up short holds true, eternal terror, no one on Judgment Day will ever wish they had been more like Martha and less like Mary.

Look back at our text. There Paul wished for his readers the blessing that he did (***Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ***) because he did not want any Child of God to come up short in the day of spiritual need. Paul had seen this happen. He had seen spiritual failure on the part of those who once believed. In his First Letter to Timothy Paul said, ***"This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."*** (1 Timothy 1:18-20)

Could you imagine the horror of standing before God having thrown away or neglected to death your own saving faith? Paul had seen men and women do just that. It was obviously with profound sadness and sobriety that he spoke of handing Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan. I have no doubt that it was done out of his deep and on-going

concern that this sort of thing never happen again. Paul could not stand the thought of any human being in hell. He longed that they might never fall short. Listen to his expression of love for his own people, the Jews, in Romans 9:1-3: ***"I am speaking the truth in Christ--I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit-- ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh."***

It was Paul's Christian love for his fellow sinners that moved him to want the very best for them. What a difference today. Today we also talk about *"wanting the very best"* but we almost always mean something much different. Paul knew what the very best really was. So in our text he says, ***"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge-- ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** Paul was able to stay focused on the fact that the only way a Christian could ever possibly become a failure in this life is if he were to be found without faith at the coming of Jesus on Judgment Day. That is why he goes on in our text: ***"... as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. "*** That, dear Christians, is the bottom line. It is what life on earth is all about. In a strange sort of ironic twist, life on earth is really not about life on earth. It is about life eternal after this life.

That is why we resolve to continue to encourage each other in the year to come to make full use of the opportunities for spiritual strength and growth available here and in your own homes. Avoiding the two weekly Bible Classes here because *"you don't know enough and others might find out how little you know about the Bible"* is like saying you are too sick or grievously injured to go to the hospital. That is what Bible Classes are for – for strengthening and growth, so that no one comes up short on the Last Day. An hour with your Bible every single day in the quiet privacy of your own home will also bring spiritual blessings, strengths, insights, and growth in ways you cannot now envision. Through that strengthening, God will protect you in the days to come from enemies and dangers you might never even perceive.

While all that we have said to this point is absolutely true, it is revealing to step back from time to time and take a look at the bigger picture – the picture where God is the center of the universe, not man. This is not something we do naturally. Our natural, sinful inclination is to make ourselves the focal point of our existence – the center of our universe. So too in connection with “not coming up short” the focus has been on “What’s in it for us?” or, more specifically, “What’s in it for me?” At times it almost seems that we weigh our spiritual options in life without even factoring God and his wishes into the equation. Our daily decision on making every possible use of God’s Word is based on whether or not I have something better to do, whether I can spare the time, whether or not I want to go, whether or not I am interested in the subject, whether or not I enjoy that sort of thing. Lots of “I” in all of that. Not much “God.” When did we stop making our decisions on the basis of God’s will and start making them solely on the basis of our *own* will and our *own* desire? Our lives and decisions would be greatly simplified and vastly improved if we would start making all of our decisions with one thought in mind: “*What would my God tell me to do if I could ask him face to face?*” Makes it profoundly less complicated, doesn’t it? “*Heavenly Father, should I go to church and Bible Class this morning or just stay home and get a jump on the day’s inactivity?*” “*Lord Jesus, I know you said ‘Watch and pray’ but did you mean television or your Word?*”

Not really difficult when you put it into those terms, is it? When we remove ourselves from the throne of our own hearts and restore our Lord to his rightful position, the right decision most often becomes pretty obvious. The problem, again, is pridefully imagining that we belong to ourselves rather than to our God, and that our time on this earth is our own, rather than our God’s. Scripture tells us quite plainly: “***Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.***” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) The incredibly amazing part of all this is that *God’s will for us is all about us, all about our salvation.*

The price paid for our salvation was the perfect life of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, mercilessly offered in a bloody, tortured death on that hill outside of Jerusalem. He was not sent as an example. He was sent to do for us what we would not, could not, do for ourselves – offer a full payment for all of our sins. Jesus has now done that. God the Father has declared you and me “not guilty” because of it. Salvation is ours.

No one here wants to fall *short* on Judgment Day. Pray God then that he would instill a *longing* in your heart for his Word and will. Our text

concludes with these words: “***I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.***” Think then about what we have just heard and learned. God longs for our salvation – even though there is really nothing in that for him. Paul longs for our salvation – even though, again, there is nothing in it for him. All the Old Testament prophets, all the Apostles, all did what they did and said what they said not because it would benefit themselves but always others. All was a result of a longing that as many souls as possible could be spared hell and gain heaven. You and I often seem far less concerned about our own eternal future than they. God help us to correct this problem in the church year just beginning. Amen.

ESV **Isaiah 64:1-9** Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence-- ² as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil-- to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! ³ When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. ⁴ From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him. ⁵ You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? ⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. ⁷ There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities. ⁸ But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. ⁹ Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people.

ESV **Mark 13:33-37** Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning-- ³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

ESV **1 Corinthians 1:3-10** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ ¶ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge-- ⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you-- ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹⁰ ¶ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.



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The First Sunday in Advent – December 3, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 702 (Brown Hymnal)

"As Angels Joyed with One Accord"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 64:1-9) Mankind was not in need of an enabler to show us how to earn God's love. We have no power to do such things. We needed a Savior. In our Old Testament lesson the Holy Spirit through the pen of the Prophet Isaiah describes our desperate condition and our need for divine rescue. Note especially the humble character of these words. Man comes to God always and only as an empty-handed beggar, bringing nothing but our sin.

Psalm 8 (Supplement page 27) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Mark 13:33-37) As we begin another church year, we again are reminded to watch for our Lord's return. The society in which we live, together with our own sinful flesh, combine to distract us so easily and cause us to forget that our Lord Jesus will return suddenly. Our Gospel lesson serves as a timely reminder, yet it does little good if we do not take it to heart.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 73 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates"

The Sermon – 1 Corinthians 1:3-10 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Longing"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 95 (Stanzas 1-4, 7) (Red Hymnal)

"Savior of the Nations, Come"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 73 (Stanza 5) (Red Hymnal)

"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (26) Average (43) Wednesday (22)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-5:00 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Advent Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship Meal
	-12:00 p.m.	– Annual Voters & WF Meetings

CLC News – Pastor Michael Wilke is considering calls to the newly formed dual parish of Calvary of Marquette and St. Peter's of Iron River. Pastor David Pfeiffer is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet Monday, December 4 (tomorrow evening) at 5pm.

Midweek Advent Service – The second of our three Midweek Advent services is scheduled for Wednesday at 7pm.

Church Christmas Party – Thanks to all who planned and participated in yesterday's annual Church Christmas party. As always, great food, fellowship, and fun.

Congratulations! – God delivered to the Strege family a healthy baby girl (Chesney Kay) early Thursday morning. Both mom and baby are doing well. Chesney was received into God's kingdom of grace through baptism on Thursday evening. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!

Annual Voters and Women's Fellowship Meetings – The Annual Meeting of the Voters Assembly is scheduled for next Sunday, December 10th, at 12:00pm. The Women's Fellowship is also scheduled to meet at that time. As is our custom, the meetings will be preceded by a fellowship meal. If you are a voting member, or eligible to become one, please consider attending this the most important meeting of the year, when elections are held and the annual budget is adopted.