

Thanksgiving.

Text: 1 Cor 1:4-9

1) Thanksgiving to God

Suggested Hymns:

2) God is faithful

184, 300, 793, 340, 186

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, ⁴ *I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,* ⁵ *that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,* ⁶ *even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,* ⁷ *so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,* ⁸ *who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless 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.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today is a day where we look back on our lives at St. Martin's thanking God for the many blessing which we have received.

Our text says, *I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,* ⁵ *that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge.*

We have had the joy of the Word and the Sacrament in our midst. We have had the blessing of worshipping with a clear conscience, not having to wonder what will happen next. Our first Worship Service was on the 22nd of February 2000.

But it is not only a time to look back, but a time especially to look forward. We must always remain faithful to our Lord and Saviour until our dying day, or when the Lord returns, which ever is first.

Our text says that we lack no gift and that we are to be *eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,*⁸ *who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In the first three verses of the chapter from which our epistle is taken St. Paul asserts his authority for writing to his readers. He was *“Called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God.”*¹ He reminds them of their own dignity, that they are *“the Church of God,”* that are *“sanctified in Christ Jesus,”* and *“called to be saints.”*²

So here, Paul emphasises this apostleship. Not only does he call himself an apostle of Jesus Christ; he also states that he was *called by God* to be an apostle and that it was *God’s will* that he be an apostle. In three different ways, Paul emphasises his divine commission.

Paul then wishes them *“grace and peace from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Now, in our Epistle the Apostle very prominently gives expression to two thoughts. Firstly, He gives thanks to God for the grace bestowed upon the Christians to whom he was writing, and secondly, He expresses the firm confidence that God in His faithfulness will keep them in this grace to the end, to the great Day of Jesus Christ.

This is a very appropriate message for our last Worship Service at St. Martin’s. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Paul Gives Thanks To God For The Grace Bestowed Upon The Christians To Whom He Was Writing.

With the exception of the Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul begins all his letters to congregations with thanks and praises to God for the faith of his readers.

We need not wonder at this if we bear in mind his own experience, his miraculous conversion to faith in Jesus Christ, the time *when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace,*¹⁶ *to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.*³

The peace and joy, the assurance that he was a child of God through Christ, the living hope of eternal life that filled his own heart to overflowing, made him rejoice over the faith of others, made him give thanks to God, the Author of that faith.

Paul thanks God for the rich blessings the Corinthians have received in abundance. Foremost among those blessings is God's grace in Christ Jesus. There is no greater blessing than grace, the pardoning love of God in his Son, who died for us. This is the heart and soul of the Gospel, the sure foundation of our Christian faith.

Let us also who by the grace of God have become partakers of this new life of faith render thanks and praises to God for this precious gift. How empty, how meaningless, how dreary, is a life without faith!

In times of prosperity, health, and strength, people are seemingly getting along fairly well without God; but, oh, how different when they meet with adversity, sickness, and all kinds of discouragement, when they feel their own helplessness, when even despair seizes upon them, and when those days come that try men's souls!

How thankful we Christians ought to be for our faith in an almighty, all-wise, and ever faithful God, who rules all things for our temporal and eternal good!

However, beware of the sin of Israel! For example as we read in Numbers 21:4-6, ***4 Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."*** ⁶ ***So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.***

They were not thankful but complained and spoke against God and Moses. We know what happened, those who trusted God looked at the bronze serpent and lived, a foreshadow of Christ on the Cross. But those who did not, died.

And in Numbers 14:2-3 we read that *all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! ³ “Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?”*

Many of the people of Israel did not appreciate what the Lord had done for them and wanted to return to Egypt. They said this after the spies returned from Canaan. They were not thankful. However, Joshua and Caleb trusted the Lord. God told them that they would spend 40 years in the wilderness. Only those 19 years and younger, and Joshua and Caleb entered the promised land.⁴ Let us always trust the Lord.

The apostle now tells us wherein this grace of God consists. *“You were enriched in everything by Him.”* True believers are rich; for they have God, and God is rich. In John 1:16 we are told that of *His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.* Today we are still receiving everything we need for body and soul. We have nothing of ourselves except our sins. God is the Giver of all good and perfect gifts; and He is so rich and generous in the bestowal of His gifts.

The Corinthians appear to have valued eloquence and wisdom above anything else. Many of them paid good money to travelling teachers who trained them to become eloquent and persuasive speakers. They pursued this wisdom as the highest good in life; they were proud of this knowledge.

Now the Corinthian Christians, through grace in Christ Jesus, had gained a wisdom greater than anything they had ever known. They had a message to proclaim that was more important than the most eloquent among them had ever delivered. They were truly enriched in all their speaking and in all their knowledge.

Like us, the congregation in Corinth had been enriched *“in all utterance and in all knowledge.”* The Holy Spirit had enlightened them with His gifts, given them a clear knowledge of God and heavenly things and also the ability to eloquently express in words (*“in all utterance”*) what God had done and accomplished in their hearts.

“Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.” The testimony of Christ was the Gospel, the blessed tidings of God’s grace in Christ Jesus, His only-begotten Son. This Gospel had taken hold of their hearts and souls, and had created a new spiritual life in them.

It was what Paul had preached to them about Christ as God’s Son and the Saviour of all mankind that “confirmed” them in faith. A Christian has a certainty that no unbeliever can ever know. This certainty affects all he knows and everything he says.

Of this new life, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit they were sure, just as sure as a person is sure of his bodily life. Every true believer has this inner testimony of the Holy Spirit in himself and is thereby assured of the truth of the Gospel. And the more intent a Christian is upon leading a life in God, according to His Word, the stronger and firmer his convictions will become.

The congregation in Corinth had received many spiritual gifts from God, as the apostle shows later on in his letter to them. In our text he says, ***“so that you come short in no gift.”*** God’s grace had been showered upon them abundantly, and the apostle rejoiced because of this and thanked God for it.

They had all the gifts that God gives His believers: wisdom, faith, love, virtue, devotion, patience, and endurance.

Oh, that we all would learn this lesson! If we wish to grow in the knowledge and grace of God, let us thankfully acknowledge what God has done for us in the past. This is so often forgotten and neglected by many people to the great detriment of their spiritual life. God wants us to acknowledge His gifts and to thank Him for them.

The Christians in Corinth not only lacked nothing, but were ***“eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** This was the constant attitude of the early Christians. Their hope and expectation was the coming of the Lord in His glory at the end of the world.

Since they possessed the gifts with which God enriches His people, they were convinced that their Lord would return in glory to take them to Himself in heaven, and they eagerly awaited His return. The Christian who lives his life with the prayer, ***“Come, Lord Jesus,”*** in his heart is rich in grace and knowledge and faith and spiritual gifts.

Already while here on earth believers enjoy many and most precious blessings: the assurance of the forgiveness of all their sins, the peace of God in their own hearts, access to the throne of grace in prayer, and blessed comfort in times of troubles and tribulations.

But still we are only strangers and pilgrims in this world. We are walking by faith, not by sight, and we are longing is to see Jesus face to face whom we love, although we do not see Him now.

As a bride waits for the coming of the bridegroom as recorded in Scripture,⁵ so every true Christian longs for Christ's second coming to our full and final redemption.

2. Paul Expresses The Firm Confidence That God In His Faithfulness Will Keep Them In This Grace To The End, To The Great Day Of Jesus Christ.

In the last part of our epistle the apostle expresses the firm confidence that God, who is faithful, will keep them in His grace to the end, to the glorious day of the Lord. “*Who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

The apostle has the firm confidence, as he expresses it in Philippians 1:6, that *He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*, and this because of His faithfulness.

Their Saviour's promise that He will keep them in the faith until the end comes as a special assurance to those who await His return. Paul assures the Corinthians that they can count on God to keep the saving faith alive in their hearts, so that they will be with their Lord in eternity. God keeps His promises to His believers, who share in the life of His Son.

Misgivings about their perseverance until the end will sometimes harass the heart of the believers. They feel their own weakness. They know of the many trials and temptations coming over Christians here on earth. They know that Satan and the world, and their own corrupt flesh are deadly enemies of their faith. They know of many people who had run well for a time but have fallen away.

Then they also know of the many warnings of Scripture against security. Is not all this enough to put fear and trembling into their hearts? Does not Paul say that we should work out our own salvation with fear and trembling in Philippians 2:12?

And does not Christ Himself say in Matthew 10:22 that only *he who endures to the end will be saved?*

All these warnings and admonitions are directed against carnal security and self-confidence, into which we so easily fall, as we see in the case of Peter.

But to whom must we lift up our eyes and hearts when thoughts like these come to us? The answer is in Hebrews 12:2, *“Let us look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.”*

Paul gives all credit to God for our salvation. Everything we are and have as Christians he attributes to Jesus Christ. Has it struck you how often the apostle mentions Jesus Christ in the first nine verses of this chapter? Nowhere else in Scripture is Jesus Christ named nine times in nine successive verses. Paul is constantly pointing to Jesus Christ, and he is always expressing thanks for Jesus Christ.

Scripture always directs us to the power and faithfulness of God when thoughts of anxiety and misgivings come into our minds. Here in our text it is written, *9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

God whose love and grace has called us into His fellowship and who has kindled the light of faith in our hearts will not leave us nor forsake us. Trusting in His power and love, we know that no one can pluck us out of the hand of our Saviour. Simply look to God for help, as we read in Isaiah 45:22, *22 “Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”*

God is faithful to us and we are to be faithful to God all of our lives. Let us close with the words of the hymnist,⁶

Be thou faithful unto death,
Be thou faithful unto death:
See the promised crown of glory

In celestial light before thee.
Thy ascended Saviour saith:
Be thou faithful unto death. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:1

² 1 Corinthians 1:2

³ Galatians 1:15-16

⁴ Numbers 14:29

⁵ Matthew 25:1-13

⁶ Hymn 340