

Willow River Parish**Title: Standing Firm****Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 (NRSV)**

³ 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 has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— ⁶ just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened 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 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This past Thursday was Thanksgiving Day, one of the biggest holidays in the United States. Although we are still in difficult times, many people left their houses to meet their precious families, relatives, and friends. Thanksgiving Day offered a warm time to meet people who had been hard to see because of the virus for this year. However, the news media has many concerned about the possible spread of Covid during Thanksgiving Day festivities. I pray that we will be safe and healthy from the virus by keeping social distance and wearing a mask.

According to the church calendar, Advent starts from today. Advent is a season that waits in anticipation of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Purple is the color of Advent like Lent. Purple makes a mood of sanctity. So, some call Advent as Lent of Winter.

During this time, we light candles and wait for the day of the Lord. The candles we light are the lamp that greets our Lord, and the candles are a pillar of fire that relies on God's guidance, and the candles will be the light of comfort and peace for each family. The church calendar is God's calendar that lets you know the time and the season. We cannot know

the exact plan and time of God, but we try to match God's heart with our lives by keeping the calendar.

Only a month is left before the end of this year. At this time every year, compilers of each dictionary choose a word of the year. Collins English Dictionary chose "Lockdown" as the word of the year. The related words are Coronavirus, BLM, Key worker, Self-isolate, Social distancing, and so on. There were a lot of events that occurred this year that many are still suffering from. The words chosen by compilers reflect the reality of the current world. The economies of many countries have stagnated, and many have lost their jobs. It's unstable all over the world, and many feel anxieties.

It may be so natural to feel anxieties in these situations. But, people, including us, want certainty that doesn't waver in anything. Our God is the only one who can give us certainty in this land. As Paul said in his letter, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ that you will live a life that was confirmed by the Holy Spirit. (6)

As you already know, the letters to the Corinthians are the letters Paul wrote for them. The letters deal with problems and conflicts that they had. Paul suggested solutions and alternatives to the conflicts about claims of spiritual superiority over one another, suing one another in public courts, abusing the communal meal, and sexual misbehavior.

The issues I just mentioned were shaking the Corinthians church at the time. Paul also had conflicts with the Corinthians, took criticism, and was hurt. However, finally they recovered everything in love of Christ.

In verse 3, Paul greets the congregation of the Corinthians saying, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The greeting is very common, but very precious. I hope Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul said that "I thank my God always for you, because of God's grace that was given to you in Christ Jesus." (4) and "...You were called by

him to partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (9) Paul knew and believed that grace and peace came from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are limitations to the grace and peace that people can give and they are not guaranteed. However, grace and peace from God have no limits and they are guaranteed. It is spiritual, psychological, and physical. It is different from the value of the world. Grace is a gift that God gives us at no cost. We cannot buy it with anything. In Hebrew language, shalom means peace. It encompasses all internal peace, physical peace, and peace in relationship. Grace and peace are one-sided given to us by God, and do not require us to make any payment. When grace and peace are connected to my life, there is plenty in life. Therefore, we must always connect our lives to God’s grace and peace in order for our lives to be blessed and happy.

The certainty of our lives is not based on an uncertain world. Grace and peace from God give us stability and rest, and confirm us. So pray for God’s grace every day. Pray for God’s shalom every day. Bless each other. Love grace and hope peace. So rely on God and leave worries, concerns, and anxieties that shake you in God’s hands. Grace and peace from God are one-sided, but it leads and guides us to the relationship with God. Let’s read verse 9 together: “God is faithful, and you were called by him to partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Beloved, how do you love the word of God? How do you live with God? Thomas Merton, an American Trappist monk, says that “Faith is to look at the world God has given us by continuously cleaning the windows of our hearts.”

Paul wants us to stand firm in the name of Jesus Christ, now and forevermore saying, “God will also confirm your testimony about Christ until the end so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (8) Jesus Christ saves us. His name makes us stand firm in the

faith. His name guarantees grace and peace the world cannot provide. His cross raises my weakness up.

The message of Advent is Immanuel, which means our savior is with us. God showed his love to the world that listens to the cries of the marginalized and forgives sins. One of symbols of Advent is candle. Candles are bright, warm, beautiful, but weak and fragile. Nothing is as fragile as a candle in the wind. However, the candle is a sign of waiting, and a sign that expects the second coming of Christ.

The message of Christmas is far from strong power or the story of a prince. It is not fancy, strong, a story of a hero among the rich. It is a story of the savior that came in the midst of starry fields, beasts, and poor shepherds. That is the essence of Immanuel. Here is the deep comfort of God. Here is a strong basis for hope. Here is the love of Christ who loved all the people and came to this land.

Paul also waited for the coming of Christ just like we are now. Corinthians and he confessed their conflicts, anxieties, and weakness in their unstable situations, saying "...you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." (7) So we must stay awake in the midst of waiting. One day we will stand before God. Therefore, we must be conscious of the times of salvation, and always have partnership with God. We must believe that there are grace and peace in God only, and practice love in our lives by waiting based on the name of Christ.

When we stay awake, our hearts can be opened to our neighbors, and we can sympathize other's pain, sadness, years, and loneliness. That is the wisdom God wants us to do. May Willow River Parish members stand firm in the name of Jesus Christ in the midst of an uneasy life and situation. Amen.