

**Sermon Preached
by Doug King
December 1, 2002
Advent I
First Corinthians 1:3-9**

Good old smooth talking Paul, judging by his introduction of this letter to the Corinthians you would think the Church at Corinth was just about the perfect Christian community. Well let me tell you, in case you have not read the rest of Corinthians recently, that is far from the truth. The rest of the letter is all about Paul trying to fix all the things that are going wrong, more than a S.W.A.T. team of angels and church consultants could ever overcome.

So why is Paul talking these Corinthians up so much? If we listen to the text closely he is not really praising the Corinthians but praising what God has done in them. He praises what God in Jesus Christ has given them; how they have been enriched in him, how Christ has been strengthened among them; how they are not lacking in any spiritual gift; how they will be strengthened to the end; and even how they will be found blameless.

Well if God has done so much for them how come the signs are not quite as obvious when we view how the community at Corinth is living together? Welcome to the season of Advent. Advent is a time when we are constantly reminded of the gifts given to us by God and how far our world has fallen short in reflecting those gifts. Advent is a time when we wait for all of those wonderful gifts and promises of God to bear fertile fruit in the midst of our broken-ness. At least that is what we are supposed to be doing. Every year we dutifully pray for the arrival of the Christ in our midst, but we tend to mark it off more as an exercise rather than a quest seeking fruition. We may be counting down the days to Christmas Crown Roasts, and some of us are counting down the days until toys, toys, toys, but few of us are seeking to count down the days until God's immanent in-breaking into our world turning everything joyfully upside down.

Why do you suppose that is? History and common sense have taught us that we should not waste too much time watching and waiting for God's arrival in any major way. And Lord knows we trust history and common sense more than we trust just about anything else.

My friend Tom Are tells this story. He writes, "In high school I needed a car, or so it seemed to me. Boss, my father's father, whose name was given to him by my grandmother so that he could be Boss at least in name, called and said I could buy his Pontiac. It was a chocolate brown Pontiac Catalina with 146,000 miles on it. All of those miles were spent pulling a little trailer along the back roads of South Carolina to every hardware store in the upstate. He sold paintbrushes, and paint thinners, sandpaper and drop cloths—those kind of things.

He said I could have the car for \$500 as is. I saved my paychecks from working at Western Sizzlin', an experience that generally leads me to eat elsewhere. We made the deal and I drove it home from Batesburg to Atlanta. When I got it home I began the normal washing and waxing and vacuuming. But first I had to remove the sugar. Little individualized Dixie Crystal sugar packets, the kind you get in restaurants, were everywhere. They were under the seat and in the seats. They were in the trunk and the glove box. Part of the defroster failed to work because sugar packets had slid down the dash and blocked the airflow.

Everyday Boss would go to Hardees for breakfast. He would get a coffee from the drive thru. 'Cream and Sugar?' 'Just sugar.' He drank his coffee black, but they were offering free sugar. He took it and at the end of the week he would come into the kitchen with a handful of Dixie Crystal packs (obviously not all that he had collected that week) and one by one empty them into the kitchen sugar bowl. It was his 'little extra compensation' he called it. He did this for the same reason he wore his shoes until his feet got wet and wore his shirts until his elbows poked through. This man was a child of the depression, and that yesterday governed his tomorrow. He carried it with him every

day. It was a part of almost every conversation. He has few rational thoughts these days, as his brain is dying more quickly than the rest of him. But the few thoughts that remain are still depression thoughts. He worries. He still returns from the Presbyterian Home cafeteria to his room to discover in his sweater pocket a few packets of Dixie Crystals."

Now there is nothing at all wrong with being frugal. There are enough of you here this morning with Scottish blood to remind me of that truth. But there is an important lesson to be learned here about how we get what my friend calls "trapped by our yesterdays. How yesterday's failures and yesterday's injuries can capture our spirits and leave us confined by what we have been."

That is why in this advent season we need to hear the words of Paul. We need to be reminded of God's gifts and promises for us, and we need to claim them. In advent we need to be waiting and watching for the future, but not patiently waiting as if what we were waiting for was not that important or not really going to happen. We need to be waiting for God the way our children wait for the Christmas toys. We need to be waiting with anxious anticipation. We need to be bargaining and pleading with the universe for the day to come as soon as possible. We need to be waiting with the steadfast belief that a joy so big as to be beyond comprehension is around the corner. And just because we have not seen it yet, it does not mean it is not on the way. Just because we live in a world of violence and war, it does not mean God's peace is not on the way. Just because we live in a world of hurting people, it does not mean God's healing is not on the way. Just because we live in a world of isolation and fear, it does not mean that God's loving and enveloping arms are not on the way.

This advent let us find a little less of our truth in history and common sense and a little more of our truth in the promise given to us by God. Let us lay claim to God's strengthening presence in Jesus Christ among us, and God's strengthening of us. Let us hold fast to the reality that Christ will indeed be revealed in our midst. Let us look beyond what has come before. Let us lay aside our Dixie Crystal sugar packets, the burdens and hurts and failures of the past, that our arms may be open to receive God's

transforming presence on the way. Let us wait with purpose and with hope for what lays ahead. Let us wait with an eye for God's future. Let us wait. Amen.