

1 Corinthians 1:3 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.

You are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This past week, the television air time was filled with commercials for Black Friday. The King of the Air Time appeared (based on the stations I watched) to be Walmart. We saw the commercials so often that we could begin to say the words before the actors in the commercials did.

One of those commercials had a woman pushing a cart filled to the brim with gifts, going up to the Walmart employee asking **if he could read the items on her list**. He looked at it and then at her, and said, **“But everything is already crossed off this list.”** And she hoots in victory, gloating that **“Yes, it is. I am finished!”**

She was not lacking in any gift as she awaited the coming of Christmas.

I don't think that is what Paul meant when he wrote to the church at Corinth and said: **You are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

But— here on the first Sunday of Advent – can you imagine how she felt --to have it all done, to be finished in the preparations, in the shopping, to know the Peace of being finished?

No more lists. No more checking it twice. No more worrying. **Just settling back and to be not lacking any gift as you await the coming of Christmas.**

Would you know PEACE then?

The apostle Paul was writing to a church he had founded in the Greek city of Corinthians. He was writing to them about PEACE, for they were experiencing division – division among themselves.

Sometimes when I stand behind the communion table, and lift the bread up into the air, and break it saying, **“The Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven”** and then break it in two, I can look beyond the bread out into the congregation, and see the Body of Christ who is gathered there, and see that there are some who are broken and fragmented, separated by divisions un-cured and festering, by fractured relationships, by broken promises, by hurt feelings, by divided thinkings.

And sometimes when I lift the cup and say, **“The Blood of Christ, the cup of our salvation,”** I can feel a one-ness that is washing over us, drawing us together, and feel like I do when we sing that song,

**There’s a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,
and I know that it’s the Spirit of the Lord;
there are sweet expressions on each face,
and I know they feel the presence of the Lord.
Sweet Holy Spirit, sweet heavenly Dove,
stay right here with us, filling us with your love;
and for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;
without a doubt we’ll know that we have been revived
when we shall leave this place.** [Sweet, Sweet Spirit, UMH 334]

It is at the Lord’s Table where we meet – broken and ragged, tattered and torn.

It is at the Lord’s Table we meet, where we are healed, not scattered, and differences comfortably worn.

It will be at the Lord’s Table, where we gather with all the Saints, ON THE OTHER SIDE, where we will know perfectly how God makes for unity without uniformity; where differences will not divide us; where peace is what encompasses us.

But that peace – that seemingly elusive peace – does not suddenly pop up ON THE OTHER SIDE, without being known before.

Annie Dillard said it well when she said, “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing.”

Indeed, what we are doing, today, tomorrow, and the next, is **what we are becoming.**

Would you say that with me:

What I am doing, today

Tomorrow, and the next day,

Is indeed what I am becoming.

Remember Paul's words: **You are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

You already have all that you need.

The PEACE that passes all understanding is right here – right in front of your face. Do you know it?

When I take Holy Communion in worship to the people of Edgewood Summit and to Charleston Gardens each month, I usually end the worship with this Benediction: **“Go in Peace, but Do No Go to Pieces.” That is a Reality Choice we all face – and particularly in THIS SEASON.**

Robert Benson was one of the instructors for a week in the two year Academy of Spiritual Formation that I was privileged to attend a few years back. He was different

from most of the other instructors we had over that two year period. He had walked some pathways that the others had not.

In his book that I later purchased, ***“Between the Dreaming and the Coming True,”*** he told of the one Spring where he almost died – at his own hands. His life had unraveled and had gotten to the lowest level he believed possible. He finally took himself to see the doctor that a friend had recommended.

His sister was with him there at the hospital. He wrote:

“That was the spring that I met Norma.

“The elevator bell rang and the door opened, and there she was. She looked down at me, and said my name with a question mark at the end, and I stood up and she took me across to the other side of the hospital. I held my sister’s hand as we followed Norma, who chatted cheerfully the whole way. I was afraid of her right from the start. ...

“I thought I was losing my mind, and it turns out that I was not too far off the mark. ... Later in the day, they came and took my shoestrings away from me, along with my belt, my pocketknife, my car keys, and my shoes. I remember being relieved. They were afraid I might hurt myself with them; I was afraid I would never be able to figure out which of the three drawers in my room to put them in. ...

“So with one hand in my pocket and the other in my sister’s hand, I followed Norma. I did it because it seemed to be literally the only thing I could do.”

“[Robert then describes the two hour process in which Norma took ‘intake information.’ Robert could only do it for a few minutes at a time and then would need a break, and Norma would step away from her desk and leave him with plenty of time.]

“Finally, [he writes] **I told Norma that I would like to go home and think about whether or not I wanted to stay.** She came and stood about two feet from me. She was taller than me by a good four or five inches, and she looked

down into my face and back into my eyes somewhere and smiled very firmly. **'You are too sick to go anywhere. You cannot leave now. You do not have to stay forever, but you do have to stay the rest of the day and tonight. Tomorrow, we will see what happens.'**

"I do not want to," [said Robert.]

"She ignored me, **'Your sister will come in and get a list of things you need from home and who you want called, and I will go arrange for a room where you can lie down and rest for a bit.'** She opened the door and my sister came in.

"I decided that I'll stay overnight," [Robert told his sister] as though [he] had actually decided. [He wrote:] I had been right about Norma from the beginning; I was right to be afraid. She had a good deal more in mind for me than a nap and a meal and a good night's rest.

"[Robert was taken to his room and given a sedative. He went to sleep immediately and slept for four hours.] When I awoke, Norma was in the room.

"Thank you for letting me stay," I managed [to say.]

"With a grin, she said, **'I am glad you decided to. You are very sick, and you would have hurt yourself.'**

"[Robert Benson goes on in his book, for several pages, describing how long it had taken him to get to this point in his life, and how when he checked OUT OF the hospital he had a deeper understanding of how it had happened and how he was going to become well. He concluded with these words:] **"None of which would have happened had it not been for Norma."**

It has not just suddenly happened to us. It has taken us several years to get to where we are. But we really have gotten to the point where we are so confused, we think: **Getting all of the things purchased and accomplished on this list will make me ready for Christmas.**

Paul tells us: **You are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

What you are doing, today

Tomorrow, and the next day,

Is indeed what you are becoming.

You already have all that you need.

Hear the **Voice of Norma** that you really need to hear:

You really need to stop – right now – and for each day during this season of Advent.

Stop for five minutes

– **three times a day**

– **figure out what three times it will be**

– **and then stick to it.**

– **And in those three minutes, STOP, LOOK, LISTEN, REMEMBER:**

– **You already have all that you need.**

– **Open your eyes and ears and take it in.**

– **You already have all that you need.**

– **Open your eyes and ears AND HEART and take it ALL IN.**

– **No list.**

– **No thoughts of the future.**

– **Just stop for five minutes and drink in all that God has to offer you IN THIS VERY MOMENT for those five minutes.**

– **Three times a day.**

What you are doing, today

Tomorrow, and the next day,

Is indeed what you are becoming.

You are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.