

## WONDERS IN THE WAITING: STRENGTH



**Scripture:**

**Isaiah 64:1-9**

<sup>1</sup>O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence — <sup>2</sup>as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil — to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! <sup>3</sup>When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. <sup>4</sup>From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. <sup>5</sup>You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. <sup>6</sup>We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. <sup>7</sup>There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. <sup>8</sup>Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. <sup>9</sup>Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever.

**1st Corinthians 1:3-9**

<sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup>I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind — <sup>6</sup>just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you — <sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



### WONDERS IN THE WAITING: STRENGTH

Living Hope - Christ enables each of us to be Living Hope for the world!

Isaiah said, “We are the clay and God is the potter. We are the work of God’s hands.”

Let that sink in for a moment. Each one of us is shaped and formed by the work of the master potter. Each one of us is the direct work of God’s hand.

Now in our passage, Paul says to the church in Corinth, the disciples of Jesus have been enriched in him, and the testimony of Christ

has been strengthened among us, so that we are not lacking in any spiritual gift. God is faithful and God strengthens us to the end.

### **ADVENT – THE SEASON OF WAITING IN HOPE**

It is the beginning of Advent, the season of waiting in hope. It is a time set aside each year to reflect upon what it means that the light of the world came to be with us, in the flesh, on earth.

The Advent season can be seen as an adventure as we wait for something special to happen again. It can be a time to practice our patience, as we anticipate the day of the birth of the Christ child. It is also an opportunity to practice patience as we wait in lines or drive in lines in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season.

Notice the shopping malls and stores don't call it the Advent season as we do. They want you to focus on *the day*. The only thing important to them is that you have the right number of gifts purchased before that day, Christmas day, December 25th.

So, all the countdowns lead up to the day of Christmas, while in Advent we promote the anticipation of Christ's birthday. We don't just focus on that day but on the wonders that await us as we wait and hope for that day. There are many wonderful things that happen while one waits.

### **LOOK FOR WONDER**

And this series of Advent sermons suggest that you look for some specific wonders during your waiting. Look for the wonders of: strength, patience, and trust during your Advent anticipation time of waiting.

And I'd love to hear any stories you can share with me that exemplify some of these ways of waiting. What strength have you found during Advent this year? Maybe you have just lost a loved one in your family. And it took all your strength to just get through Thanksgiving and now Christmas seems daunting. But somehow you find the strength. I wonder how?

Maybe you tend to lose your patience during Advent because of the pressures in the Christmas season. But this year, your ability to be patient and loving overflowed somehow.

Or maybe you were not sure if you really mattered to God. You have been feeling small and not very important lately. Not much like a special clay work of art by our master sculptor. And you can't imagine how God could see or know or care about you personally. Yet something happened this Advent that led you to trust in God's care for you. Please share these stories.

These are my hopes for each of you this Advent, and I am grateful for this season that inspires us to look for wonders around us in our everyday lives.

### **GOD IS LOVE**

Ponder this: the testimony of Christ that Paul says is "strengthened in you" is the testimony that God is love. That is the strength from God within you that has shaped and formed your spiritual gifts for ministry in the world today. The Corinthian disciples of old had these gifts in the church in Corinth, too.

**Your strength, like theirs,  
is based on God's love. And that love  
from God is not all fluffy and pretty.  
It is strong enough to make mountains  
quake as Isaiah described.  
The love God gives you strengthens you  
so you can help others "in the waiting."  
Because so many believe that God never  
comes for them, they are always waiting.  
How empty that must feel!**

### **MOST PEOPLE BELIEVE IN GOD**

The majority of people in the world still do believe in God. But it is barely a majority today. According to a recent poll by Reuters, just 51% of the world's population believes definitively in God. According to the survey, "definitive belief in a God" is highest in Indonesia (93 percent). Remember that we recently had Rebecca Young, our missionary in

Indonesia, speak to us about her work there. The next highest is Turkey (91 percent), followed by Brazil (84 percent), South Africa (83 percent) and Mexico (78 percent).

A new Harris Poll finds that while a strong majority (74%) of U.S. adults does believe in God, this belief is in decline when compared to previous years. Belief in God is in decline because there is not a lot of difference demonstrated in the lives of those who do believe compared with those who don't believe.

Bertrand Russell was once asked how he would explain his unbelief if he died and met God. Russell said he would tell God, "You didn't give enough evidence."

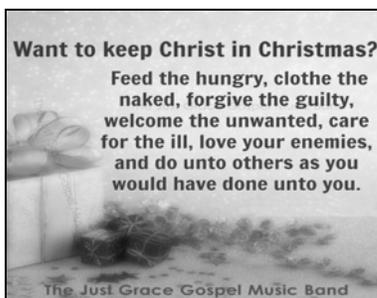
So your faith can help the over 25% in the United States that have no sense of the presence of God in their lives. Christmas season must seem so materialistic to that segment of the population and life must seem pretty empty and hopeless.

But that doesn't mean we go out and drag people into church with us. What it means is to show them what wonder there is in the waiting for the birth of Jesus Christ!

### WONDER AND CURIOSITY

I spent Thanksgiving with a family friend and her mother who is ninety-three. When I asked her the secret to living long and keeping her brain so alert, she credited the fact that she has always had a sense of wonder and a curiosity for life.

If you want to put Christ back in Christmas, then this is what we do to show the world how disciples of Christ celebrate Advent and Christmas: Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, forgive the guilty, welcome the unwanted, care for the ill, love your enemies and do unto others as you would have them do unto you.



### COMBAT THE CHAOS

But it takes incredible strength to not succumb to the seduction of consumerism and Christmas shopping chaos. It takes so much strength of heart and mind to keep one-self peaceful during this Advent season.

With all the worldly fears encroaching on our sense of peace and security each day, it is easy to succumb to the fear of scarcity. Our country has the strongest military machine, the most dominant economy, and a fine healthcare system compared to the rest of the world. And yet we remain fearful and unsure about our future because our fears are fanned by the media. When the beheadings are on our TV every other week and the obliteration of people's homes in Gaza or the war in Syria causing displaced refugees around the world, how can we have strength and inner peace this Advent?

**One way to combat the chaos in the world is to focus your energies on helping with the Giving Tree program. Another way is to purchase your gifts from the Alternative Christmas shopping list in your bulletin today. By giving meaningful gifts of your time and talent to others through the church and other worthwhile charities you are giving yourself a gift of peace and hope.**

All of us believers in God in the global church are called by God to live out a vision of peace and justice for all of God's children that shapes our response to these global fears. Justice can not roll down like the waters if we don't respond to our Messiah's call to stop trusting in false Gods during Advent. We must embrace God's true vision of peace and justice with our lives. And while we wait in the wonder of the Advent season, let us call upon our Emmanuel for strength and courage in mind and heart.

**REV. RIT ANDERSON  
A STRONG DISCIPLE OF CHRIST**

A wonderful example of a disciple of Christ showing strength in the midst of chaos and fear was Reverend Rit Anderson. One of the ways Rit showed Christ-inspired strength was in an essay he wrote in response to the tragedy of 9/11. He titled it:

"The Road Best Traveled"

I have priceless beliefs and strong convictions  
I believe society is a family affair  
That each of us happily depends on others  
And that others expect to depend on me.  
I believe that living well together is expensive  
And I am eager to share my part.  
And expect my neighbors to share theirs.  
So I want to go on the offensive  
What I believe is so important that I want others to hear it  
To share it, to live it, and proclaim its value to the world.  
I want to spread our light to dispel the present gloom,  
To see the scowls disappear and joyous smiles replace them.  
But I refuse to close my ears and mind  
For answers that I seek may be from another's brain  
And answers that my neighbor's seek may be in mine.  
Can we not listen to each other?  
Can we not see the value of another's thinking?  
Can we not allow ideas to unite us rather than separate us?  
What made us Americans so reluctant to accept someone else's values?  
What caused us to be so edgy and bristly with each other?  
Has the terrorist won by getting us to war against each other;  
To distrust each other, and stop honoring each other?  
Did 9/11 make us fearful of every thought that comes from another?  
Surely you are as eager for peace as I.  
Certainly you want better days ahead.  
I am eager to hear a remedy for our illnesses.  
My heart cries out for those who seek unity  
And respect for each other  
Which to me, and, I hope to you, is the American way.  
Our present course leads to disaster  
It's up to us to take a better road ahead.

So let us go and do, as Paul taught the Corinthians, and as "Rit" inspired, and use the strength Christ has enriched in us to promote a sense of God's peace this Advent.

As we wait for the Christ Child once again use all your strength (and hope) to keep Christ in Christmas by presenting the evidence that God is love. Amen

**Benediction:**

**I would love to see images or hear stories that demonstrate evidence of God's strength and hope for you this week. We will post some on our Facebook page.**

**For example, this image is a small red maple tree I transplanted a few months ago. I was so worried the move and extreme trimming might kill it. But look at the tiny leaves that are popping out now! This strong little tree is showing me to have hope in nature's resilience. It is for me a wonderful sign of hope during this time of waiting.....**



**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit bring us peace now and forevermore. Amen**



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