

November 29, 2020  
Rev. Kerry Smith

1 Corinthians 1:1–9  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Advent Between Two Worlds

1 Corinthians 1:1–9

Inclusive Bible

From Paul, called by God's will to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, together with Sosthenes our brother. To the church of God in Corinth, you who have been consecrated in Christ Jesus and called to be a holy people, as well as to all who, wherever they may be, call on the name of Jesus Christ, their Redeemer and ours: Grace and peace from our Loving God and our Savior Jesus Christ. I continually thank my God for you, because of the gift bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, in whom you have been richly endowed with every gift of speech and knowledge. In the same way, the testimony about Christ has been so confirmed among you that you lack no spiritual gift, as you wait for the revelation of our Savior Jesus Christ. God will strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Savior Jesus Christ. God, through whom you have been called into intimacy with Jesus our Savior, is faithful.

A few weeks ago Kristi Hassell shared these words with me. They are taken from a Brene Brown podcast with author Sonya Renee Taylor. “We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate, and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment—one that fits all of humanity and nature.”

Advent is a time when we stitch together a new garment – we lift up the coming of the Christ both as a baby born in Bethlehem and the coming of the Christ at the end of the time. It is a time for us to lift up this idea of the already and not yet aspect of our faith. God is with us and yet, our world is not yet how God wants it to be. In 2020 as we prepare for Christmas, it has never been clearer that we are living between two worlds – the world as it is and the world as it should be. This pandemic has given us all an opportunity for us to think about how we want our lives to be. So much of our lives has stopped and I'm not sure that all of it will start back up again.

In that podcast Sonya Renee Taylor and Brene Brown talk about what we have been forced to leave behind in this pandemic. They talk about the idea that what is getting us through is what we will need to take forward. They encourage us to dream while we have so much time. Dream of the life you want. Dream of the world you desire to exist in. One of the statistics that made me so happy but also so sad was that March 2020 was the first March without a school shooting since 2002. That is the year most current high school seniors were born. Nearly two decades of a school shooting, sometimes every day. However, gun dealers around our country have seen record numbers of customers. One gun store manager said the main reason customers said they were buying firearms was for protection during quarantine and fear of the unknown.<sup>1</sup>

The world as it is and the world as it should be. What can we do about it? 2020 also commemorated 60 years since 6 year old Ruby Bridges walked to school and showed how first graders can be trailblazers. So much has changed in our world, but we still live in between two worlds, what is and what God wants it to be.

We heard in our Scripture from a church planter. Paul had started this house church in Corinth and people were being people and the church was fighting. There were factions and some people wanted to go back to their former lives to serve their former gods and resume life as they once knew it. Other people are saying that they are better than others, you know, better than those who are weaker in the faith. Those people who aren't as good as they are.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-first-march-without-school-shooting-since-2002-united-states/>

Paul had received reports that church members were making questionable decisions by living wild lives. Some church members were questioning the resurrection. The problems seemed overwhelming and unrelenting.

Paul starts his letter to the Corinthians and sets the tone by addressing God's church in Corinth. God has made these people holy in Christ and called them to be saints. God has given them the ability to live a life of grace and peace. Paul gives thanks to God for God's work and God's grace among the people. Paul reminds them that whatever knowledge that they have or whatever abilities they possess have been given to them by God. God has even given them spiritual gifts to use for the building up of God's church. Paul's letter is grounded in the work of God among them, and the reminder that God is faithful. God is the one who called them together in this fellowship, and God will see them through.

Paul reminds them everything they have and everything they are comes from God. There would be no community of faith without God. And whatever problems they are facing, the God who called them is powerful enough not only to help them find a way forward, but to strengthen them even as they wait for Jesus.

Today we are torn by many issues. Each side claims some knowledge from scripture to build up their arguments and the chasm between us gets deeper and deeper. God is at work even in the midst of the chaos that we create. This advent as we wait for the coming of the Christ at Christmas, may we also look for God's work among us and remind ourselves of the gifts that God has given us to strengthen this world rather than to tear it down. It is a gift and a calling that God gives to us and to this community of faith. We are called to be saints and share God's love together with all those in every place who call upon the name of Jesus.

It reminds me of the story of the Gauls. Now, this is probably more legend than actual historical fact. It is about a people known as the Gauls. In ancient times, the Gauls inhabited what is now France and Belgium. They spoke a Celtic language, and their religion was Druidic. By the time of the Christian era, the Roman Empire had conquered the Gauls, and they were theoretically under its control. Many of the Gauls, however, did not take well to being a conquered people, so various uprisings and battles continually broke out. In the meantime, though, a number of Christian missionaries went into the territory to evangelize. Over time, many of the Gauls converted to Christianity and were baptized. But here is the legend: The story goes that before the Gauls would go under the water for their baptism, they would hold up one arm in order to keep it from getting wet. Therefore, when the next battle broke out, the Gaul could proclaim, "This arm is not baptized." He would then grab his club, sword, or axe with that particular arm and ride off to destroy his enemy.<sup>2</sup>

We live between these two worlds, as it is and how God wants it to be. I invite us this Advent to dip both our arms and all of our body into the world as God wants it to be. Paul talks about working our own salvation in another of his letters (Philippians 2:12-13). We have this long period of preparation, it's not even December yet and Advent has started. As we prepare for the coming of the Christ child, we renew our desire for the second coming when our world will be as God wants it to be. May we cooperate with all that God is seeking to do in this world so that it can be restored and healed. May we work out our salvation by working with God. Thanks be to God, Amen.

---

<sup>2</sup> Story told by Rev. Shannon Kershner, <http://fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/100415.html>. Source is Mark Allan Powell, Giving to God, pp.xi-xii