

## Foolishness of the Cross

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Lent / Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 2:13-22; John 2:23-25

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- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Lenten King. Amen.

Many people call the preaching of the cross, foolishness. This goes back to even Paul when Festus charged Paul with insanity for preaching the cross when he says, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” Many people do not want to hear the preaching of the cross, which includes both the hard truth about who we are as sinners and then the beloved Good News that we are redeemed by Christ crucified.

There is also the temptation in the church not to rely on the Holy Spirit in building up the church. There is a temptation for the church to focus on the twin idols of numbers and money, which can drive the church’s agenda instead of centering the mission of the church on the faithful preaching and the administration of the Sacraments.

The Holy Spirit is the one that does the heavy lifting really, He’s the one that “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” by the Means of Grace - when and where he pleases. However, many congregations-including Lutherans are often tempted to rely not completely on the Word, but add in their human efforts. There is lots of things that can be said here. There could be the style of worship where you go to be entertained instead of convicted and forgiven. There are the worship services that call for a decision to follow Jesus. There is also the preaching that reflects on the individual and the goal for the individual to be happy and feel good about oneself with little mention of God. And then there is the common and ever so prevalent prosperity Gospel that makes promises about our earthly blessings that God didn’t make. Everyone wants to hear the answer to the question, “What’s in it for me?”

To preach Christ Crucified over and over again for the forgiveness of sins is foolishness to a world that is perishing.

But it is in the preaching of Christ crucified that we find God's Wisdom, strength, and salvation, for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who trust and believe in the message.

In our text today, Paul is preaching to a context in Corinth that is quite similar to our world today. Corinth was a busy, highly commercialized, cosmopolitan Greek city. They were preoccupied with making a living, following current trends, and looking to politicians to solve their problems. Religiously they followed the current fads, "worshipped the "gods" to appease them and get what they wanted out of them, such as prosperity. And even in 1st century Corinth they treaded their sporting events like a religion. Doesn't it sound like 21st Century America.

To the Jews of the time, including those in Corinth, the message of the cross was a "stumbling block"—not unlike today's thinking. It was incredible to the Jews that God's chosen one would end his life on a cross. This is despite what the prophets told us long ago that this would happen. Today, our society preaches to us to avoid suffering. To many suffering is seen as a sign of God's disapproval. They looked for signs and miracles as proof. Many Jews looked for a Davidic Messiah that would conquer the Romans and restore their land. They remembered the crossing of the Red Sea, the manna from heaven, and the destruction of the Walls of Jericho. They were looking for something spectacular.

Even today, people demand signs and miracles from God. How many times have you prayed for God to heal someone right now? How many times have you prayed for God to eliminate Covid 3 months ago? People are looking for a faith based on experience and feelings rather than desiring the Word of God. As the Jews despised Jesus for being meek and lowly, one who served and gave his life on the cross, he's not the Messiah our world is looking for today either.

to the Greeks of the first century, including the Corinthians, the message of the cross was foolishness---very much the reaction of many today.

The Greeks believed that the body was evil, that only the Spirit had value. They saw the very idea of incarnation, of God becoming man, as revolting, an insult to the gods, and impossible. Their gods often meddles in human affairs, but for their own selfish agendas.

Many people today believe in an impersonal God if they believe in one at all, one who is not interested in the affairs of humanity. Believing in a god who doesn't really care about you makes the preaching of the cross not only foolish but incomprehensible.

The Greeks sought wisdom. This kind of of wisdom is not from God, but from men. It refers to one with a clever mind and a cunning tongue, someone who spends endless hours discussing meaningless trivias, someone who has no real interest in solutions. The Greeks were obsessed with finding words and philosophical arguments. For them, the Christian preacher's blunt message was extremely uncultured.

Today many preachers are also tempted to fill their time with meaningless trivia and filler to amuse and entertain. They give people what they want to hear and never challenge them. Conversely, a message that proclaims the cross draws a different kind of laughter—mocking—instead of listening with respect.

Today, as back then, the preaching of the cross is regarded as foolish. Christians are seen as uninformed creatures who believe in fairy tales, all because we believe the Scriptures and what happened 2000 years ago on Calvary. Christians are also seen as bigoted, hateful, and are being “cancelled” over our scriptural beliefs. We are called foolish for what we believe in. What we believe in is actually Wisdom. Paul writes to young Pastor Timothy:

**English Standard Version Chapter 3**

you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

This so-called foolish message is the power and wisdom of God.

And yes, we have to admit, the Church today is not that far from the Corinthian Church. Paul infers that the people who had been drawn into the church were

not, for the most part, the elite. The Corinthian congregation was composed of the simplest and humblest of people. Yet some even of the highest ranks of society were becoming Christian. God calls together people like we are—from different backgrounds, education, and experience—and he makes us the Church. I thank God we aren't all the same.

Every year, we, the Church, gather to hear the foolish truths of the Cross proclaimed.

Every Lent, and I thank God, this year it is all in-person, we prepare for the events that will lead up to Easter. We walk the difficult steps to Gethsemane. We climb up Golgotha's mount and contemplate the hours of torment on the cross. We rehearse these events of Holy Week and the familiar parts of the liturgy and hymns that we have sung for years. We know what will happen. We know how the story plays out. We hear the familiar shouts of "Crucify Him! Free Barabbas!" rise from the Satanic-inspired crowd. We are drawn to the events year after year. Why?

Why do we come to hear this "foolishness?" Because we have come to know that all the wisdom of the world and all the foolish rhetoric of sinful humanity—those who think they have all the answers—all come into focus at the cross. We hear:

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25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Because the seeming logic of our debates, the skill of our mental exercising, the creativity we try to employ, all fall away as we believe in Christ Crucified.

It would be easy for us to follow the culture. After all, isn't that what the devil wants, for us to soften to the message and make it more appealing to the masses. But even the slightest modification to make the crucifixion and resurrection appealing (and even the rest of the Word) goes against John's directive to remain faithful even unto death.

The World will see us Christians as foolish and weak. They may even try to cancel us or even say that God's will doesn't matter. But we don't live in our own wisdom or our own strength...we live in Christ's. You live in Christ's wisdom and strength. Paul reminds us the Church then and now:

**English Standard Version Chapter 12**

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Therefore Paul then says:

**English Standard Version Chapter 12**

I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The results? Paul preached the cross with power, as did all the apostles. They preached the cross with power because it was and is the power of God.

All the treasures of divine wisdom and of knowledge are bound up in Christ and are now to be seen in the foolish and weak act of the crucifixion and the foolishness of preaching about it. Now, the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God are given as gifts from God.

People will see what they want to see. People will hear what they want to hear. People will believe what they want to believe when it comes to the Christian faith. They may try and tell us what to believe or what we need to bend to, but we will not. We will preach Christ crucified. We will preach the full counsel of God. And when it comes to your salvation, dear Christian...you heard what God wants you to hear, you receive what He wants you to receive, and you believe what He has written in his Blessed Word. You have faith, which God so graciously gave you and continues to nurture by the Means of Grace; his Son, by his blood, has won salvation for you all. The Cross is foolishness to many, it's a stumbling block to others, but to you dear Christian, the one who believes, the cross is your way of salvation. You have salvation because of Jesus, because of His Cross and the empty tomb. You have salvation because you have been

granted faith by the Holy Spirit and you trust in what God wants you to see and hear. This is God's plan and it cannot be missed.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.