

Sermon Draft

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Sermon: God's Wisdom

There might be times in our lives when we are confused and unsure about what direction to go next. We live in the information age with readily available knowledge literally at our finger tips.

There has been more information generated in the last thirty years than during the past 5,000. Having an abundance of information available does not always solve our problems. We are told that to improve our health we should try different foods, new drugs, or vitamin supplements, only to discover a couple of years later that we should avoid that product. Instead of being beneficial a new study reveals the product might actually cause harm. All this wealth of information leaves us confused.

We need to hear the apostle Paul's words whenever we are confused and mistakenly think that church is about us and meeting our immediate needs. Paul reminds us that not everything is about us. Paul draws our attention instead to the foundation of our faith.

As we have discovered the Corinthians experienced more than their share of problems before they contacted Paul with the hope that he could set them on the right path again. They had lost their focus and were reduced to fighting with each other. Sides were drawn and harsh words spoken. The inevitable result was feelings were hurt, and the mission of the church came to a grinding halt.

While there were some people within that church who were of noble birth, the majority were not. Those with this perceived higher status thought they were better than the other people.

Others thought they possessed more knowledge or were on a higher spiritual plane than everyone else in the church. These attitudes were causing the problems within the church.

Today we must constantly be on guard against having a superior attitude because we are "church going people", believing that we are somehow better than other people who have had different life experiences and are not part of the church. If we are not careful the attitude that we are better than other people can creep into the church. The end result is instead of attracting people to Jesus Christ and the church those attitudes repel people, turning them off completely. Who can blame them for not wanting to have anything to do with the church?

In the midst of all this Paul goes back to the basics of our faith. At times when we lose our focus it is always good to review what we believe.

While the people were divided into groups their common denominator was the cross. In the front of most churches there is a cross. The cross reminds us that Jesus Christ suffered and died for our sins and the sins of the world. Furthermore, the cross symbolizes that God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus Christ is the resurrected Lord in whom we place our trust. Paul wrote, ***“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*** There is power in the cross because it represents the power of God at work in our lives and in our world.

Paul knew the transforming power of the cross from his own personal experience. Earlier in his career Paul felt that he needed to persecute followers of Jesus. In his mind, he believed that eliminating Christians was what God desired of him.

All that dramatically changed after Paul's encounter with the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul was struck blind for three days and when another believer touched him his sight returned.

When he opened his eyes, he viewed his faith differently, he came to grips with the transforming power of the cross of Jesus Christ. Instead of persecuting believers Paul became the church's foremost missionary.

Nothing would be able to stop Paul from proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

Rick Founds works at a fiber optics company. On the weekends, Rick is a worship leader at his church. Every morning Rick reads scripture on his computer monitor. Then, he says, "I'd just reach over and grab my guitar. I'd plunk along with whatever I was reading that day."

One morning, as he was studying the attributes of God, he began writing some notes when suddenly it struck him; "God knows the end from the beginning. God had a plan to redeem us from the very beginning." As Rick meditated over the morning's Bible verse and plucked his guitar he thought about the cycle of rain that comes down and waters the earth, then evaporates into the clouds, and then returns. Suddenly the now-famous chorus emerged, **"You came from heaven to earth to show the way. From the earth to the cross, my debt to pay; From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky."**

"Knowing the whole history of humanity, from its beginning to its end," Rick reflects, "God made the decision 'to show the way.' The response to grasping even a little bit of that knowledge can only be praise and thanksgiving and gratitude!"

However, not everyone was drawn to the power of the cross. To those who sought after human wisdom the cross was viewed as a symbol of death and ultimately failure. Some people believed wisdom was the pathway to enlightenment and had difficulty focusing on the cross. The people living in Corinth were heavily influenced by Greek thought and philosophy. Paul points out that worldly wisdom did not lead to salvation, ***“the world did not know God through wisdom,”*** Paul claims. All the wisdom in the world does not lead anyone to God. Only through the cross can we find the God who saves us.

Paul was not saying that acquiring wisdom was not important. We benefit daily from the many scientific and medical advances made over the last fifty years. Many diseases have been eliminated through the hard work of dedicated doctors and researchers to which we are thankful.

While learning is important we need to remember that knowledge does not always lead us to God. As Lutherans, we would be remis if we didn't pause and recall that it is by grace though faith that we are saved and not by works so that no one can boast. And of course, God's grace is given freely and faith is a gift of God.

Some viewed the cross as foolishness and some still do. The notion that God would save humanity through the cross was inconceivable to those from a Jewish background. They had preconceived notions of what the messiah would accomplish; the idea that the messiah would suffer and die was nonsense to them. They demanded a "sign." The Greeks loved wisdom and might not have given the cross a second thought.

While the cross was a stumbling block and foolishness for some people, it was the power to save a sinful humanity. For that reason, Paul proclaimed the cross.

Paul redefines wisdom as Christ for both Jew and Greek, ***“Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*** This serves as another reminder that God’s ways are not always our ways. The way we look at our world is not the same way that God sees us.

Paul explains, ***“For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.”***

It was time for the people to go back to the basics of faith. Paul wanted the people to ***“consider your own call.”*** Not many were wise by human standards, or powerful, or of noble birth, but God called them to become the church to witness to their community the good news of Jesus Christ.

The power of the cross is that only God is able to take people who appear to be insignificant, or weak, and transform them. Paul was a living example of someone who underwent a major life transformation. God is the source of all our human achievements. God deserves the credit. If we are going to boast, Paul suggests let us, ***"boast in the Lord."***

It's easy to lose our focus and allow other thoughts to invade our faith. In order to surrender all to Jesus we might have to relinquish everything that gets in our way. Sometimes it is our attitudes that prevent us from becoming the people Jesus has called us to be. The Corinthians thought wisdom was the pathway to God. Instead, Paul wanted them to focus on the cross of Jesus Christ.

While the Corinthians were vying for positions of power and status Paul encouraged them to take a fresh look at the Cross and reconnect to the power of God at work in their lives. God chose people who were weak and powerless ***“so that no one might boast in the presence of God.”***

May we continue to focus on our Lord Jesus Christ. We are called together to be the church in our community. We surrender our lives to Jesus. Amen