

Sermon Draft

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18–31

Sermon: “Christ Crucified”

There has always been a temptation by clergy and church leaders to do whatever it takes to get people in the pews and keep them in the pews. The temptation is to rely not upon the work of the Holy Spirit through the faithful preaching of Christ crucified and the rightly administered sacraments. Rather, the twin idols of numbers and money can drive the church’s agenda instead of centering the mission of the church on faithful preaching.

The Holy Spirit ***“calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith”*** (Small Catechism, Third Article) by the Means of Grace, when and where he pleases. However, in order to “help” the work of God, congregations are often tempted to rely not upon the Word but upon human factors. These can be many and varied.

(Some examples: incorporating an entertainment style of worship; revivalist-style preaching that calls for a decision for Christ; preaching that does not preach Law and Gospel, but something akin to “moralistic therapeutic deism”; and the ever prevalent “prosperity gospel” that makes promises that God does not make.)

This kind of preaching appeals to the natural man, the self-centered man who is always wondering, “What’s in it for me?”

To preach continually Christ crucified 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 this message.

The Corinthian setting was not far from our world today. Corinth was a busy, highly commercial, cosmopolitan Greek city. The Corinthians were preoccupied with making a living, following current trends, looking to politicians to solve their problems.

Religiously, they followed the current fads, worshiped the “gods” to appease them and get what they wanted out of them, such as prosperity. And they treated sporting events like a religion! Sounds familiar does it not?

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 (Deuteronomy 21:23). Despite Isaiah 53 and other prophecies, they had lost sight of a suffering Messiah.

Today, our society avoids suffering, believing that God will always bless us with good things. Suffering is seen as a sign of God’s disapproval. The Jews also looked for signs and miracles as proof. These were varied and many. Many Jews looked for a Davidic Messiah to conquer the Romans and restore their land. They remembered the miracles of the Red Sea crossing, the manna from heaven, the destruction of the walls of Jericho.

They looked for the spectacular.

Even today, people demand signs and miracles from God (immediate healings, speaking in tongues, faith based on experiences 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 is not the Messiah our world today expects 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 meddled in human affairs, but for their own selfish agendas.

Many people today believe in an impersonal God, one who is not interested in the affairs of humanity.

Believing in a god who does not really care about you makes the preaching of the cross not only foolish but incomprehensible. The Greeks sought wisdom. This kind of wisdom is not from God but from men. It refers to one with a clever mind and cunning tongue, someone who spends endless hours discussing hairsplitting trivialities, someone who has no real interest in any solutions.

The Greeks were obsessed with fine words and philosophical arguments. For them, the Christian preacher's blunt message was extremely uncultured.

Today, many preachers are also tempted to fill up their time with trivialities and filler to amuse and entertain. They give people what they want to hear and never challenge them in their faith. 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 two thousand years ago on Calvary. But this is the true wisdom that saves: ***“You have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation”*** (2 Timothy 3:15). ***“This is eternal life,” Jesus declares, “that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”*** (John 17:3). This so-called “foolish” message remains the power and wisdom of God.

The Church today not 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 (v 26). The Corinthian congregation was composed of the simplest and humblest 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.

Every year we, the Church, gather to hear the “foolish” truths of the cross proclaimed. Every Lenten season we prepare for the events that will lead up to Easter. We walk the difficult steps to Gethsemane. We climb to Golgotha 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 since we were children. We know what will happen. We hear the familiar shouts of “Crucify him! Crucify him!” rise from the satanic-inspired crowd. We are drawn into 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 this world and all the foolish rhetoric of sinful humanity those who think they have all the answers all come into focus at the cross.

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (v 25). 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, trying to soften the message and make it more appealing to the masses. But even the slightest modification to make the crucifixion and resurrection acceptable goes against John’s directive to remain faithful even unto death (Revelation 2:10).

The world will see us Christians as foolish and weak. But we do not live in our own wisdom or our own strength; we live in Christ’s. Paul also reminds the Church then and now that Jesus says, ***“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*** Therefore, Paul can say, ***“For when I am weak, then I am strong”*** (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

The result? 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 (v 18). All the treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge are bound up in Christ (Colossians 2:3) 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” (v 30).

People will see what they want to see, hear what they want to hear, believe what they want to believe when it comes to the Christian faith. But when it comes to salvation, we hear what God wants us to hear, receive what he wants to give us, and believe in what has been written in his blessed Word.

We have faith, which God so graciously gave us and continues to nurture by the Means of Grace; his Son, by his blood, has won salvation for us. It is foolishness and a stumbling block to many, but those who believe in the crucified and risen Lord have salvation.

We have salvation because we trust in what God wants us to see and hear. This is God's plan, and it cannot be missed.

Amen