

“We preach Christ crucified”

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[0:00] For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, for we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. Let us pray. Lord, we ask that you will open our ears and open our hearts to receive your word this morning. Lord, I pray that you will speak through me, help me, Lord, to be able to preach your word faithfully and give us all ears to hear Christ in the pages of scripture and in the preaching of God's word this morning. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Last week, we looked at Paul. We looked at his statement in verse, we ended in verse 17 there when he talked about his primary aim as an apostle and as a minister of the gospel. In verse 17, just look ahead one verse before, Paul says, for Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. Here, Paul says to us and to the Corinthians that the gospel proclamation is the way that God establishes his church. So what then is the gospel? The gospel is the message of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the proclamation of Jesus' victory over sin and death. True is the atoning death on the cross. There at the cross, he once and for all reconciled us with God the Father.

He paid the penalty for our sins and gifted us with his life eternal. As I say this, this sounds wonderful to our ears today, doesn't it? I hope it does. I hope that the message of the cross sounds wonderful to your ears.

[2:35] As it should. Because it is good news. But the Greek word, euangelion, is where we derive the word evangelism, actually, in our English.

But that's the word gospel, really. That's the good news here. That's the Greek word. But it was not good news for many in Apostle Paul's day. It was, in fact, a scandal.

A stumbling block. It was a hideous story which glorifies a tool of torture. A tool of capital punishment.

As the means by which God will redeem and restore humanity. For the word of the cross, Paul says in verse 18, is folly to those who are perishing.

But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Now, if you look in your bulletin, you see the cover page of the bulletin. This Sunday gives us such an example of what people in Paul's day see as the scandal of the cross.

[3:46] There, on the first page of your bulletin, is a picture that depicts an archaeological find. It was discovered in 1857 on a wall near the Palantine Hill in Rome.

It's a graffiti. And it was likely from the first century A.D. It shows a figure with the head of a donkey. There's another word we use for donkeys in our day. Right? It shows a figure with the head of a donkey being crucified. And a man stands in front of that picture, a figure of the head of a donkey. A man stands beside it, raising his hand in worship. And there's an inscription that goes with the graffiti. Alex Aminus worships his God.

It is an etched drawing that marks the Christian faith. This is what Alex Aminus' friends and neighbors think of his faith in Jesus Christ.

[4:53] Now, this picture sheds light on how the ancient world saw the cross and the Christian faith. This thing that Paul says is his main calling to proclaim.

It's seen by the world as a madman's tale. It's seen by the world as part of foolishness. It's interesting to note that today, we revere the cross.

We fashion it into jewelry and hang it around our necks. Our church is bedazzled with it all over. Your homes are adorned with the cross.

However, this was not always the case. The cross was a symbol of torture, of capital punishment. It's like, it's as if someone says, if we all start walking around in our day with the guillotine or the electric chair figurines around our necks.

[5:59] And in truth, if we go beyond the commercialization of the symbol of the cross in our day, if we get beyond that, when we, in fact, even today, look at the message of the cross itself, we will find that it is still, today, a symbol of shame, a symbol of mockery and revulsion to the world.

The cross of Christ sifts humanity into two groups. There are two groups. Those who see it as folly, as foolishness, and therefore are perishing.

And then there's another group. Those who see the cross of Christ as the power of God. And therefore are being saved. Because they've come to, they've been called by God.

And they've come to faith in Him. They've come to believe. That is the only two groups that matter in God's economy. We divide ourselves along different stratas.

Economic, racial, that doesn't mean anything to God. We are all created in His image. But He does divide us according to where we stand in relationship to the cross of Christ.

[7:26] Those who are perishing and those who are being saved. And note here that Paul didn't say that while it is foolishness to those who are perishing, you might be expecting to say in verse 18 there, it is foolishness, it is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is wisdom.

But that's not what Paul says. Rather, he says, it is the power of God to those who are being saved. That is why Paul was so adamant to say in verse 17 that he's not come to preach with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power.

And this actually is at the heart of the problem in Corinth. The Corinthians celebrated eloquence and human wisdom.

We, in our day, have movie stars as celebrities. In Corinth, in the first century, their celebrities were rhetoricians and philosophers.

Skilled debaters. Skilled orators. Who can move crowds with their words. And so, in Corinth, on Friday evening, what they do as entertainment is go out and listen to these rhetoricians and their skills and the way they fashion words.

[9:10] But Paul wants us to see that that is not what the preaching of the cross is. He was not doing it with words of eloquent wisdom. Corinthians were looking for that.

They were searching for people who can move and dazzle with the ways that the philosophers of their day does. And it's not necessarily with their wisdom. By the way, these philosophers of Corinth's day, it's not so much that they were great in wisdom and persuasion by reasoning. It's not that they reasoned people into agreeing with them. But it's really rather by the flourish in which they say the words that they say. With their eloquence.

With the style they use. That's what the Corinthians were looking at, looking and searching for. And this is what the culture of Corinth celebrates. And we will come to find that this is also the things that the church in Corinth seeks.

There lies the problem. The church is seeking after the same thing the culture is seeking after. In their worldliness, they sought after the same thing the culture around them longed for.

[10:25] They want to baptize the values of the world in Christian terms and jargons. That's what the church in Corinth is trying to do.

Sounds familiar? It's not very much unlike some of the things that are going on in the church today. We are very much like the Corinthian church in our day.

The word of the cross is no longer sufficient. Rather, people are searching for charismatic preachers. The preaching of the gospel has become entertainment in many churches.

It's the turn of praise and the mannerisms of the deliverer that moves people. And not the content of the gospel message itself.

And such churches that draws crowds. Such churches will draw crowds. Because although they claim to proclaim Christ crucified, rather what they're doing is following after the folly of the world.

[11:39] And the wisdom and values of the world. So, verse 18 is a severe warning to all of us. It is a severe warning.

Why do we gather here every Sunday morning? What do we hope to hear? Are you here to listen to a message that tickles your ears?

That tells you what a great person you are? Or perhaps you want to follow Christ. To find the secret to success. Or the secret to happiness. I want to tell you that all of that you will find in Christ. If you follow Him. You will find true happiness. Not the way the world thinks of happiness. Your value will be changed to Christ's values. You will find joy.

You will find peace in Christ. But not the way the world looks for it. Not the way the world searches for it. But are you looking for the things the world is looking for?

[12 : 45] And are you hoping to find it here when you gather on Sunday morning? I want to tell you this morning that it is only through the message of the cross. That you will find true joy.

True happiness. True success. According to God's definition of what success looks like. But. The cross is folly. It's foolishness to the world. Precisely because it is not something that elevates humanity.

The message of the cross is completely alien to anything we could have ever come up with. And it was intentionally so.

Paul tells us in verse 19. It was God's intention to make it so. For it is written. I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. And the discernment of the discerning.

[13 : 43] I will thwart. Paul here quotes Isaiah 29. For it is written. What Paul needs to tell us is that it has always been God's plan all along.

To bring human wisdom to nothing. By displaying his saving power through the most impossible and humiliating means possible.

Paul says this is the power of God. The cross. That we think is foolishness. Is the power of God.

But think about power is communicated in our world. Think about it for a second. Power is communicated in our world by force. The person with the biggest bronze.

Whether you define bronze by muscles or weapons. The person with the biggest. Is to be reckoned with. In our world. The person with the biggest influence.

[14 : 46] Political or social influence. Whether it's procured by their money because they're wealthy. Or because it's procured by the amount of followers they get.

Because they're famous. Or both. Those are the people in our world that have power. That is how power is communicated.

That is how one gets power. But the message of the cross tells of a man from the backwater region of Galilee. Who claims to be the son of God.

Who was then put to death by the powers of his day. And Paul tells us. And he tells the Corinthians. And the disciples of Jesus Christ throughout the first century.

Goes around. Went around. Saying. That this. Is a display. Of God's power. Paul means to tell us.

[15 : 50] That this event of the cross. Was in fact. The fulfillment of God's plan. And the display. Of God's wisdom and power. And in doing so.

He brought to nothing. That is God brought to nothing. The wisdom of the world. In all its pride. And its arrogance. Against God. And it is.

It is precisely. Because the world's foolishness. Because of the world's foolishness rather. It is precisely because of the world's foolishness. That it cannot recognize. The wisdom and power of God.

In the cross. I want you to see here. That Paul isn't talking about. A matter of dwelling power structures. He is not saying that. As if man's power.

Is on this side. And man's power. Stands against. God's power. In opposition. That's not what Paul is saying. Rather what he. He wants us to see is that. The world.

[16 : 47] Perceive. That. He wants us to see that. What the world perceives. As power. And wisdom. And might. And influence. What the world.

Glories in. In all its arrogance. Is in fact. Proof. Of the world's. Foolishness. And stupidity. Paul drives this point home.

In the series of rhetorical questions. He puts to the Corinthians. In verse 20. He asks. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe?

Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish. The wisdom of the world? Well then. Where are your wise men and women?

Paul is asking. Where are the ones you extol. And celebrate. And look to. For directions. How far have they come.

[17:49] In solving the existential problem. Of humanity. What is the existential problem. Of humanity? It is the eternal separation. Between man and God. Due to our sin.

And Paul seems to be asking them. Has not God obliterated. Human wisdom. And show. And show it for the foolishness. That it is.

So this. This series of questions. In verse 20. Paul uses it. To attack the confidence. Of both the Jewish world. And the Greek world.

He says. The Jews put their confidence. In their wise men. Who are the wise men. Of the Jewish world. The scribes. Their rabbis.

Their teachers. And interpreters. Of the law. Those are their wise men. And they. These wise men. In all their wisdom. And knowledge. Of the scriptures.

[18:50] Could not see the wisdom of God. In the message of Jesus Christ. In fact. They hated Jesus. They reviled him. They sought to crucify him.

Today. Today. Such people will be. The religious leaders. Of our day. Who deny Christ. And they can come from all the world's religions.

Islam. Hinduism. Buddhism. Even Christianity. Such religious leaders.

These wise men. These learned people. Theologians. They teach a way of salvation. That denies the true way of Christ crucified.

They speak of salvation. And ignore the cross. I think we have to take note.

[19:51] That such religious wise men. Can and do exist in the church. There are many. Who proclaim to be teachers of the Bible. And yet do not preach Christ crucified.

Instead. They have adopted the methods. And the wisdom of the world. They preach a theology of glory. That tells you of a God.

Who came to save. And deliver. But they are embarrassed. To speak of sin. They are embarrassed. To speak of the price. Jesus had to pay.

On the cross. To appease the wrath of God. They preach what we will call today. Moral therapeutic deism. That just means.

They simply say to you. That God is a nice therapist. That's the kind of God he is. I'm not making any aspersions. I'm not casting aspersions on therapists here.

[20:48] Mind you. But they will say. God is just a nice therapist there. He's there to make you feel good. I know. It's really reviling.

Reviling what they say. They say. God is a nice therapist. He's there to make you feel good. To be nice to people. God is there to help you. To be nice to people. And to help you. And them.

To also. Them also to be nice to you. God is only there. To help you. To be a better version of you. But they will not speak of sin.

Of which you must repent of. After all. God is nice. You will never send anyone to hell. Or they will say.

You must put in the work. Of being a better person. You must put in the work. Of earning your own salvation. There are two sides of those coins.

[21:47] Right? God. There's no hell. There's no sin. God is nice. He's just going to make you a better person. Oh yeah. Okay. Put in the work. Work harder. Be better. Both sides of that same coin.

Tell a lie. Because. They go around the cross. They ignore the cross of Jesus Christ. And such. Wisdom of the world.

It is really. In fact. Even though some people will say they're Christians. Are the ones. Preaching it. It is in fact. Nothing but the wisdom of the world. The wisdom of the Lord.

Baptized in Christian jargon. And it is in fact foolishness. It is foolishness. Because it has stripped the gospel. Of its power. And what is the power of the gospel?

Paul tells us. It is the cross. It is Christ crucified. The message of the good news. That God in Christ. Has paid the price.

[22:46] For your sin. There lies the power. Of the gospel proclamation. The message that Christ. Has paid the price. God in Christ. Has paid the price. For your sin. And that if you repent of your sin.

And trust in his finished work. At the cross. You will be forgiven. There lies the power. Of the gospel proclamation. So what of the Greeks?

The Jews have their wise men. The Greeks also have their version of wisdom. The Greeks version of wisdom is. Is the philosophies. Which they teach. To explain the meaning of the world.

And how to live in it. Paul refers to the debaters. The debater of this age. The sophists. The teachers of philosophy and rhetoric. Of Greek world. Who peddle. The popular thoughts. Of the day. Around Corinth. For payment.

[23 : 45] This is actually what went on. In the Greek culture. These rhetoricians. For money. Go around. Speaking with florist language. And getting.

Getting a following. Again remember. I said they're celebrities of their day. These wise men of the Greek world. Were celebrated. Their disciples.

Who lapped up their words. And adopted their world views. And they were paid handsomely. For their skills. At getting their point across.

In our day. Those kind of people. Will be the talk show hosts. Of our day. The pontificators. Who will tell you. What to think. And how to think.

They're the TV and radio talking heads. And podcasters. Of our day. I wonder. As believers in Jesus Christ.

[24 : 40] Where we get. Our wisdom. Our world views from. Do you get it from. The philosophers. Or the scribes.

Or do you get it from. The gospel proclamation. That has at the center of it. Christ crucified. Paul needs to tell us that.

Both the scribes. And the debaters. Are wise. According to the world's standards. But Paul asks. Has not God made the foolish.

Has not God made foolish. The wisdom of the world. And then he shows. How God did that. In verse 21. For since. In the wisdom of God. The world did not know God.

Through wisdom. It pleased God. Through the folly. Of what we preach. To save those who believe. It's clear to Paul. That the wisdom of the world.

[25 : 39] Has not. And did not. And will not. Bring anyone. To the knowledge of God. The true knowledge of God. God. And God wisely. Ordained it to be so.

To shame. Human arrogance. And disobedience. This is what Paul means. In Romans 1. When he talks of. Claiming to be wise. That is.

Humanity. Claiming to be wise. They became fools. They exchanged the glory. Of the immortal God. For images. Resembling mortal men. And birds. And animals. And creeping things.

They worshipped creatures. Instead of the one. Who created them. And God gave them up. In the lust. Of their hearts. The fruits.

Of their accumulated wisdom. Was a world. Filled. With all manner. Of unrighteousness. Evil. Convectionousness. Malice. Full of envy.

[26 : 34] Murder. Boastfulness. Strive. Deceit. Maliciousness. They are gossips. Paul tells us in Romans. Slanderers. Hates of God. Insolent. Haughty.

Boastful. Inventors of evil. Disobedient to parents. Foolish. Faithless. Heartless. Ruthless. Does it sound familiar?

This is the fruits. Of human wisdom. I think the Bible has accurately diagnosed the world.

In all its so-called wisdom. Don't you agree? Paul goes on in verse 22. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom.

The Jews demand for signs. The Jews demand for signs and the Greeks search for wisdom.

Summarizes the world's futile search for meaning and salvation. And Paul needs to tell us that the cross is the answer to both.

[27 : 41] The cross is the powerful sign of God and the wisdom of God. But for these people it is folly. It is weakness.

And you might expect Paul to now say, Well, since they can't see the cross for what it is, as the power and the wisdom of God, since they can't see it that way, well, we'll tweak our preaching. Will adopt some of their philosophy as a way to better convince them. Does Paul say that? Paul will never say that.

Because he knows it's not the eloquence or the persuasiveness of his words that will save them.

Paul says, It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

God has ordained, has chosen to use the preaching of the cross in all its foolishness as the means of salvation.

[28 : 54] And so to depart from the preaching of the cross is to depart from the means by which people can be saved. Paul will never compromise or modulate the preaching of God's word to tickle

human ears.

Therefore, Paul says, We preach Christ crucified. Paul cannot but preach that very message because it is from God. It is God's wisdom.

Although, that very message is scandalous. It is a stumbling block to the Jews who demand signs. It is foolishness to the Greeks who search for wisdom. But Paul says, To those who God has called to himself, both Jews and Greeks, Christ crucified, buried, and risen.

Here is the power of God unto salvation and the wisdom of God for human flourishing. Note again that among those who are saved, both Jews and Greeks, it is among those who are saved, both Jews.

So when Paul uses that term, Jews and Greeks, he is not actually just talking about people of Jewish origin or Greek origin the way we will understand it. So if you are not either Jews or Greeks, you are out of luck.

[30:08] That is not what Paul means here. When he says Jews in Greece, it is a catch-all. It is a catch-all for all of humanity. The Jews were the people who had the law, who had the covenant.

The Greeks are Gentiles. The Greek is just like a metonym for all who are outside the covenant of God. So, the cross is the means of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles, black and white, American and Mexican, men and women, master and slave.

The cross is the only power to save for all of humanity. No matter where you are from, no matter what your background is, no matter what your life story has been, the cross of Jesus Christ, the preaching of it, the proclamation of it, the believing in it, there lies the power to save.

The cross is the great equalizer. And that's why Paul can say, but to those who God has called to himself, both Jews and Greece, this is the power to salvation.

And he goes on, and it is so because in it, God shames the world, shames the world's wisdom. And Paul goes on in verse 25, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

[31:43] Paul is not saying that God is like us in that sometimes God can be foolish and God can be wise. He's not talking about God in those terms. He's not saying that sometimes God can be weak and God can be strong.

God is all-knowing. God is all-powerful. But he means to tell us that what the world perceives as foolishness, the cross of Christ, which the world thinks of as foolishness, what the world laughs at is in fact shown to be wiser than all of human wisdom.

The cross the world sees as weakness is stronger than all of human strength. For in the cross, God puts human wisdom and human strength to shame with his grace and mercy.

And imagine if it were not so. If human beings can really, by our wisdom and our strength, achieve what the cross accomplished. If human wisdom and strength can achieve salvation.

imagine if that were the case. Then we will have room to boast in our own ingenuity, in our own greatness, and we will continue in our arrogance.

[33:02] But the cross invalidates all human boasting because it is not something we could have thought up. The cross requires us to humble ourselves to receive the gift that is on offer at the cross.

Herein lies the beauty of the cross. How can we take this passage to heart as Christ's church? I think first we must understand the tense of verse 18.

The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. The present participle in that statement is crucial.

I know we're doing grammar this morning. Paul says we are being saved. He's referring to the three tenses of salvation. Justification, we've been saved.

Sanctification, we are being saved. Glorification, we will be saved. So, as the people of God, we cannot be presumptuous and think that the process of salvation is complete and give in to false triumphalism.

[34:13] The church of Christ is in exile. we're in the wilderness as it were and we must not be like Israel in the wilderness. We must not be given to disbelieve and to grumbling.

Rather, we must live in complete surrender and trust to God who has called us and saved us. Does the cross of Christ embarrass you?

it can and does happen in churches. Many churches are embarrassed by the message of the cross. But let that not be true of us here at Holy Trinity.

Because the cross is the place where God has powerfully called you to himself. If, in fact, you've been saved, how then can you be ashamed of the cross?

Like Paul, we cannot retreat from the proclamation of Christ crucified as the good news by which God saves. There will be temptation to adopt the wisdom of the world.

[35 : 19] There will be temptation to borrow the world's methods. But when we do so, we are confessing that the power of God at the cross is no longer sufficient to save.

May it never be true of us. Let us end by thinking again of this Alexamenos, this man, this Roman Christian, who was mocked for his faith in the crucified Jesus.

We know nothing of this man beyond this graffiti that we see mocking him. We know nothing else of him. Perhaps the mocking by his neighbors, by his family, by his friends, perhaps the mocking soon gave way to persecution.

Maybe he was one of the confessors or martyrs of the early church who were tortured and even put to death for their faith. We don't know.

One thing we do know, he was identified with Christ in Christ's death and humiliation, so much so that he was mocked and reviled by people in his world.

[36 : 28] and one thing we do know, he is now identified with Christ in his resurrection and glory. Whereas those who mock him have perished in their foolish arrogance.

The message of the cross is to us who are being saved the power of God. The message of the cross is to us who are being saved, the power of God.

Heavenly Father, grant us wisdom and courage never to forget or deny this truth, no matter what the world says or does to us. Amen.