

Third Sunday in Lent
March 3, 2024
Just a Word About the Cross
1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Well, actually, let me be more specific, if I may. Just a Word that God was crucified and rose from the dead...no, that's not quite right...I mean: Just a Word that God became flesh to die and rise again...yah, that's it! And all the wisdom of that age could never conceive of such a proclamation or admit this historical reality and yet here it is!

Now this Word is either foolishness or the power of God. For Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, there is no *acceptable* middle ground.

Paul asks today, where is the Wise *Debating* Scribe? Now, we must tread carefully here in God's Word, lest we miss the point. Paul is *not* just making a jab at the intellectual elitists and suggesting willful ignorance is holiness.

Chapter 2 helps us understand the clarity with which Paul speaks today.

"...Among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age...we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God." And it isn't that Paul doesn't like wise writing and speaking plus it's hidden by God, more like the wise ignore it or refuse to believe it as though they can hide it from themselves.

Ultimately, it is that He is concerned with the *content* of the writing, reading, and speaking.

Now, the Jews and Greeks of Paul's day were literally devising their own system of hope for the deliverance of Yahweh...and that continues today with many who consider themselves Christian. Some use God's Word to make money, morally stifle communities or wield political and communal power.

But they neglect the forgiveness of sins. They miss devotion to God's Word to be closer to Christ and they even make up hideous mishmash words of church and business terminology, like: *Sacramental Entrepreneurship*, Programmable Piety and Spiritual Perspicuity (Purse Pu Que Itty).

Ok...I just made up the last two, but the first was *actually* used by a former pastor to sell his pastoral coaching model. And, unfortunately for him, his term is no more real than my made-up terms. They all sound amazing but do nothing for our spiritual wellbeing!

You know, so called brilliant speakers, coaches and whole-life managers try telling us how to live our lives perfectly, because if you do...God will find you compelling and ultimately worthy of your salvation.

Fortunately for us sinners, THAT'S NOT WHAT GOD SAYS.

Rather, God says, "You are not wise according to the flesh." And that's true. After all, which of us have not paid our spiritual stupid tax? Who plans perfectly for God and executes that plan every time? My goodness, who has EVER written the perfect plan for God? We all sin, even willfully breaking faith with God when He has done nothing *but break His back for us.*

He also says you are not powerful. And even if we become captains of industry, political princes and princesses or even self-made women and men, there is always sinful thoughts and temptation lurking. Nobody has the power to overcome that in and of themselves. The undeniable encroachment of the end of our lives must be faced by all. Death is indeed a demanding and relentless master, caused by our sin.

Finally, God also says you do not have good genes. Now, I know that may be hard to believe for those of noble birth and relatively good health. But how many of us are even surprised anymore when yet another friend comes down with cancer, which, many times, comes completely out of nowhere? How many of us are no longer shocked by the latest heart health victim of COVID? How many of us know there is a health concern just waiting for the aging process to weaken us enough to succumb to it?

Just this last week a beloved coach and mentor to kids in the public school system was found unconscious and as of the writing of this sermon was clinging to life.

Sometimes we just whisper in our hearts...it must have just been *in their genes!* And science keeps tackling gene therapy, because the genes we got just need to be manipulated so we can all be better and stave off death forever. Ridiculous.

Today, God reminds us that He always knew all of this, and as much as we hope we'll be the lucky ones, we are resigned to the fact that flaws can manifest themselves at the most inopportune times. Clearly, no one can justify themselves when the judgment of God comes.

Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus we don't have to.

For you find yourself this day, not in your sin, rather in Christ.

He is the Word became Flesh which is all about the Cross.
He came to Earth *just dying* to live in you!

He gives you the wisdom of God from history that gives us hope for the future.

Every flood that we floated above, every freeing from ancient fascists, every endurance under evil despots - we have seen it all and we know...THIS TOO SHALL PASS

Because God in Christ is quietly and continually whispering in our ears, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me."

And we do believe, because His death has raised our hearts to eternal hope in Him.

His Righteousness and Holiness makes us righteous and Holy again. And it doesn't matter what we lacked...it matters only what Christ has made us again.

The Devil thought He had his day. After all, he watched Jesus die on the cross. But Christ didn't die to submit to the Devil, He died to ransom our liberty for His divinity.

And when Jesus walked out of that tomb alive, He showed us His victory was our victory, too.

Satan has no claim on us, we belong to Christ.

We have God, and we live in that hope, and we know the ultimate Word, which has always been about that Cross.

Now May that peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

AMEN

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