

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 6, 2016

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

We Preach Christ Crucified

Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ,

Religious symbols concisely define the essence of our faith. The fish symbol, for example, reminds us the Greek word ichthys consists of the Greek first letters in the phrase, Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior. One symbol more than any other summarizes the foundation of our faith, the cross. There are Latin crosses, Greek crosses, and others. We wear crosses around our necks and hang them on our walls.

Jesus' cross is where law and Gospel meet. There God the Father exchanged my sins for his Son holiness, his death for my life. This is the Great Exchange; the righteous One for us unrighteous ones. The cross means everything to me because on the cross Jesus Christ redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from sin, death, and the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood, and his innocent suffering and death.

By the Spirit's sanctifying work through the gospel, to us "whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. We trust in that power and wisdom of God that just brought little Ella into the kingdom of God through her Holy Baptism. For those who are perishing in unbelief, Paul wrote, the cross is foolishness. They trust something else; either man's wisdom or constant signs.

The apostle reminded the believers the cross, i.e. Jesus Christ and him crucified, was the heart of his message; as it is of ours. **We Preach Christ Crucified.** God is pleased to use this preaching to convert sinners. This preaching is above and beyond what man seeks.

Corinth was a cosmopolitan commercial crossroads. A learning center in southern Greece, its population included Greeks, other Gentiles, and Jews. Paul was well aware of his audience. His letters reflected Corinth's culture and population. Still, Christ crucified was the message to convert sinners no matter who they were. The message of the cross transcends academic, cultural, and linguistic differences.

Today, our pastors live in small rural towns, or medium sized college towns, or large metropolitan areas like Chicago or New York City. The culture and population vary but we all preach the same message. We preach Christ crucified. God is pleased to use this preaching to convert sinners.

Among our listeners will be those who are perishing because of their unbelief. They believe themselves too sophisticated, too enlightened for what they consider superstition. They will reject Christ and his work of redeeming the world on the cross because it does not make sense to human reason. It does not meet the criteria of human wisdom and intelligence. To them the cross is just so much foolishness.

The Jews in Jesus' day kept demanding signs that he was the Christ, in spite of his having done many. There were those in Corinth and are some today with that mindset. They constantly demand God do this miracle for them, or perform that service for them, or show them this vision, or give them this ability. Then they will believe, they claim, but it is never enough. To them the cross is a stumbling block, literally a scandal, because God does not meet their every demand on demand.

Still, Paul wrote, "We preach Christ crucified." God is pleased to use this preaching to convert sinners. Paul did not change the Word to make it more palatable. He did not hide the cross behind rational argument. Paul did not diminish the pain or skimp on the balm of the Great Exchange. Paul did not promise God would put up sign after sign finally to win over those who

demanded them. Those things may be what man seeks. This preaching is over and above what man seeks.

There is one thing and one thing only that has power. That one thing is the cross. The cross is Christ crucified. It is the sign for us. It is his Holy Passion. It is the culmination of his entire purpose as the Son of God come into the flesh. Jesus' resurrection from the tomb is the Father's statement that Jesus' death on the cross conquered death. His Son's death is God's wisdom, the only true wisdom, his wise way to redeem us who cannot redeem ourselves. The cross is God's forgiveness and life for us. We are powerless; dead in our transgressions and sins.

Paul speaks in a different way now. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." The apostle means what man thinks is the foolishness of God, the cross, is way above and beyond any wisdom man could come up with for redemption and salvation. He means what people would consider weakness in God, a king beaten and crucified, is stronger to save than any of man's own efforts.

What wisdom and power of God to take a little child, and by water and the Word, wash that baby's sins away and adopt her into his saving family. It is the wisdom and power of Jesus' cross. What wisdom and power of God to forgive a young wife and mother all of her sins so that when her life suddenly ends, we trust she is with her Savior in heaven. It is the wisdom and power of the cross. We preach Christ crucified. This preaching is above and beyond what man seeks.

"Drawn to the cross which you have blessed With healing gifts for souls distressed,
To find in you my life, my rest, Christ crucified I come." Amen. <SDG>