

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 The foolish wisdom of the cross!

Ash Wednesday February 17, 2010

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Amen

God's Word about the only way to know the saving truth of Jesus is written in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

These are Your Words heavenly Father to lead us in Your eternal truth. Your Word is truth.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

I was reading the recent Thoughts of Faith newsletter about eastern European countries and how near the season of Lent they follow certain customs. In the Czech Republic just before Lent people have feasts and parades where they dress up as animals, workers, or toys. In the country of Ukraine people change their diet for Lent, abstaining from meat, except for fish. They also restrict play-time for children. The Ukrainians traditionally form crosses out of dough and bake them. A thread or flower pedal is put inside and if, after baked, the thread is not burned they will have good luck for the rest of the year. In other parts of the country they bury the dough cross in a field to bring good luck to their planting. These activities in Lent have one thing in common. It's the thought that the blessings on God depend on what people do. If people go through the right motions, everything will turn out well and God won't be angry. If things don't turn out well, it means that they must have failed God in some way. Better luck next year! These are good examples of the wisdom of the world. It shows the heart of our old sinful nature and of many temptations which we face each day.

If, during Lent we want to fast or deprive ourselves of something, that can be a fine outward thing to do. But what really matters is the attitude of the heart. By the power of God's Word, the Holy Spirit has enlightened us to listen and receive the eternal comfort of God, whose ways and thinking are beyond our thoughts. Without the Spirit-given faith in Christ, the message of the cross would be nonsense to us. But by faith we trust in what the world calls

### **The foolish wisdom of the cross!**

**First, the world cannot comprehend the saving truth.** Paul wrote, "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. . . . Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*" (v.18,20) God's Word simply does not meet the expectations of the unbelieving world. "*Jews demand miraculous signs.*"(v.22) The Jews did not want to hear that they were sinners who needed to repent. They wanted physical proof without a doubt e.g. make the sun shine in the middle of the night. Then, it wouldn't be a matter of faith, but of God's glory come down to earth. That isn't faith, it's unbelief! It's what King Herod wanted. When he saw Jesus, he hoped to see a miracle. But Jesus disappointed him; never saying a word. The crowd at the foot of Jesus' cross also called for Him to perform a miracle. They said, "*Come down from the cross if you are the Christ of God! Come down and we will believe you!*" (Mark 15:32) The Jews had not been convinced by Jesus' earlier miracles, i.e. the feeding 5,000, the exorcisms, the healing of lifelong diseases, or the raising of Lazarus from death. His coming down from the cross would have made no difference to them.

We can be tempted by that kind of thinking. We ask God, "Why can't You give us items for good luck to keep bad things from happening to us (knock on wood so the good spirits in the wood will keep away trouble)? We ask, What's wrong with carrying a cross for good luck so something good will happen to us? Our friends may ask us, "If Jesus is so powerful, why can't He end all wars, stop all poverty and hunger, and bring healing to all ills? This is the thinking of the unbelieving world. To them a Savior is all about power and conquering. Yet, if we follow those kinds of questions we are yet in our sins and will be condemned to eternal death. Not one sinner is saved by their thinking.

The Greeks looked for wisdom. When Paul preached in Greece, he spoke of the crucifixion, but most people considered it a scandal. No self-respecting Greek would have been crucified, so how could Jesus be any good, thought the Greeks. And then when Paul described the resurrection from death, the Greeks thought he was crazy! The Greeks wanted a religion that could fit with their philosophy. It had to be suitable with their theory that only the spirit has value, not the body. Their philosophy praised logic and the mind to get to the point. That is how they wanted to be saved. For them, and for many people today, the Bible has too many contradictions, such as "God wants all to be

saved, yet many people are damned, or God loves sinners, yet God condemns sinners to hell. They wanted a religion that could always explain things rationally.

Pilate, like many today who hear the words of Jesus, asked, “*What is truth?*” (John 18:38) Paul wrote, “*Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?*”(v.20) We have our share of the wise today in colleges and on TV. We can learn about some things in the world from such sources, but if we base our faith in their wisdom, we will end in doubt. We daily need to say, Lord I believe, help my unbelief!

**Second, the message of the cross has saved us.** Paul wrote, “*For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.... We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. The foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.* (v. 23-25) As Christians, we see the great wisdom of the Bible. God’s truths are above human logic. We Christians should not be surprised that matters of faith are strange to those who don’t believe. By the Holy Spirit, we have learned to be at peace with God’s truths whether we can explain them or not. This is the truth that we know: Is it possible that God, who lives in glory, can bear the guilt and punishment of our sins.

If people would just listen to the Bible and let God speak for Himself they could believe! This is how God described himself, “*The LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin*” (Exodus 34:6,7). In the depths of His compassion, He chooses to forgive everything that would damn us to hell. But He didn’t make sin go away by His almighty power, as the world expects. Rather He fully punished sin by His Son. Here is the pill that the unconverted world finds so hard to swallow: God’s love and His perfect justice are reconciled at Jesus’ cross.

“*We preach Christ crucified.*” said Paul. (v.23) God laid all of the punishment of our sins on His innocent Son. On the cross God treated His Son the way we sinners deserve to be punished. “*We preach Christ crucified*” because the perfect mercy and love of God came to us sinners through the death of Jesus. Through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, God treated rebels like you and me, as though we were His holy children without us helping in any way! This wisdom of the cross is “*the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.*” (Romans 1:16).

Whenever our hearts condemn us, we don’t need to turn to good luck charms or special works on our part. The wisdom of the cross says, “*Christ Jesus, who died and who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us.* (Romans 8:33-35). Rather than be led astray, we can pray that unbelievers will be led by the Holy Spirit to see themselves as sinners, whose only help is in Christ.

The tradition of the Lent may change our lives in what we do or eat. But the message of the cross changes our hearts and minds through faith. In all situations, even death, the wisdom and power of the cross lift our eyes to God’s Son who guarantees us a safe passage to the new heaven and new earth, the home of God’s elect. Together with the apostle Paul we believe, “*In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*” (Romans 8:37) Amen.