

1 Cor. 1:22-25 The cross of Christ is our sign! Lent 3 March 8, 2015 Children – symbols

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God's grace, power, and wisdom are yours through the cross of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.

God's word about the saving power and message of the cross is written in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

These are Your Words heavenly Father given to us faith in Your saving truth. Your Word is truth! Amen.

Dear Christian Friends,

Signs are usually good things, if you pay attention to what they say. If there is new construction for a business, people often look for a sign to see what the new store will be. Signs also give directions, like our 10 church signs on various roads that lead to here. When Jesus began His bold ministry on earth, many people asked Him for a "sign." They wanted a sign to know who He was or in what direction He would take them. When Jesus began talking about dying on a cross as a sign, His own disciples questioned Him while many others gave up on Him and looked for someone else. What do we say about the cross?

The cross of Christ is our sign!

First, too many people miss the meaning of His cross. How many times haven't we seen drivers using cell phones on the freeway? They swerve over quickly because they missed the earlier sign telling them to turn off. Sadly, many people who know about the sign of the cross have missed the reason for its importance. Paul wrote, "*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.*" (v. 22, 23)

In Jesus' day, the Jews wanted visible evidence from Jesus. In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus drove the animal sellers and money cheaters out of the temple courtyards. The leaders demanded a sign to show that Jesus had authority from God to do this. They may have expected Old Testament miracles. God gave Moses three signs to show the Israelites in Egypt that God had sent him: his staff became a snake, his hand turned leprous and then was healed, and water turned to blood. Later, Moses parted the Red Sea. Perhaps the Jews wanted Jesus to part the Jordan River or they may have expected a sign like Joshua when he prayed and the sun stood still in the sky for 24 hours while Israel fought a battle. Perhaps Jesus should just ask God to send down fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifice on the altar before the temple or better yet, that He send down fire on the Roman soldiers based right next to the temple. If He could do miracles like that, they would gladly accept Him. Yet, when He did miracles, few unbelievers were brought to a true faith in God. They wanted to live by sight and not by faith! And we're tempted to do the same!

The Greeks or non-Jewish people wanted a Savior that did no miracles, but simply showed them how to live a good life by a system of philosophy. They couldn't imagine a god who would send His Son to become a humble man to save people. The way Jesus died on a cross made no good sense to them either. Nor did they accept the truth that Jesus rose from death as proof that His saving work was accomplished.

Today many people still misunderstand God's message of the cross. They want Jesus to miraculously end poverty, stop wars and inequalities, and provide safety for all people. They envision God sweeping powerfully across the country making a heaven on earth. Others reason that human knowledge is king. They want scientific theory over Bible accounts. They want shifting human reason in place of God's timeless truth. We certainly want to help people in need and we admit that true science, as a study of nature, can be wonderful. But people with only temporal goals are missing the greatest blessing the cross offers.

Second, to us who believe, the cross of Christ is a sign that points us to heaven! Paul wrote, *“To those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [the crucified is] the power of God and the wisdom of God.”* (v.24) Jesus did many signs during His ministry, but they were signs of mercy and grace: He healed a crippled man in the temple, He cast out demons from suffering people, and He raised Lazarus from death in front of a crowd. Unbelievers saw all of these signs but still did not believe in Christ because He attached a message to His miracles. The message was: “Repent of your sins before you die in them. Seek God’s forgiveness through the way that leads to cross. Your works, your positions of honor, your family heritage will not save you! Only Jesus, God’s Son, can win a place for you in heaven with God. He is the only way and His way is through the cross.” God’s wisdom planned our rescue. God’s power in Christ’s death won it for us. God’s message called us to a living faith to receive it.

Paul wrote that the message of Christ’s cross was a greater sign than what the Jews wanted and it was greater than the wisdom of the best philosophers. God knew that we couldn’t devise a plan on our own. He knew that we could never repay the debt of our sins no matter how many laws we kept. So, He sent His innocent Son as a human to die on a cross. The Bible states, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”* (Galatians 3:13) Christ’s cross of shame is glorious to all believers. By His innocent death Christ made us holy in God’s sight. The cross is still the sign that Christ has won for us and freely gives to us forgiveness and eternal life.

God has called us by His Word of the cross, to turn from the sinful world’s view and to see things His way. We gather for worship at Jesus’ cross to remember His suffering for our sins. We exclaim: “How terrible our sins have been that Jesus suffered and died for us! How can we continue to sin when He has freed us by his death?” We are certain that Jesus showed His greatest love by the cross since He willingly died to save us! Like Paul, we who believe want all people to know and believe this good news.

The cross of Christ unites us. We in this church have diverse backgrounds just like the Jews and Greeks in the Corinthian church. But, the cross of Christ brings us together. Long ago when battles were fought on open fields, each side held up a flag or banner to keep the troops united. God’s Word raises the cross of Christ, the message of His sacrifice, to draw us together. We unite to help each other as we battle sin, challenges in life, and error. We unite so we may encourage each other to stand by faith under the cross.

The cross also gives us a common objective: eternal life. The cross of Christ doesn’t just point toward to heaven. The news of Jesus’ sacrifice empowers us to believe and receive His salvation. Paul wrote, *“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God.”* (1Corinthians 1:18)

Signs are a very important part of our lives. Without signs we would easily get lost while traveling and we wouldn’t know where to buy anything we need. God has given us the cross as a sign to remind us that Jesus is the only way to heaven. His cross is the sign of free and full forgiveness through His sacrifice. Some people think that preaching about the cross is waste of time. But, we will “lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim ‘til all the world adore His sacred name.” (ELH No. 194) Amen.