

1 Corinthians 1:22-25: We Preach Christ Crucified by Vicar Stuebs

Plato, Socrates, Darwin, Einstein: Some of the smartest, most intelligent minds which the world has ever seen. Great minds that were able to lay the foundations for western philosophy; able to come up with a theory for the origins of mankind and every species; able to develop the theory of relativity. Yet none of these men were able to come up with definitive answers to life's biggest questions: Why are we here? And what will happen to us when we die? When approached with these questions, the world's wisest men were left shrugging their shoulders, debating endlessly, and in the end, holding nothing but a crumpled bag of old theories.

Paul had certainly been around men like this; coming from Athens, the intellectual capital of world, over to Corinth, the marketplace of the Aegean Sea. Yet do you see "eloquence" or "human wisdom" in Paul's message to the Corinthians today? You don't, because God didn't bury his mystery in the confines of some intricate intellectual puzzle or at the end of some elaborate maze so that only those who were wise and powerful enough could find it. He placed his mystery in plain sight for all to see, hear, and believe. And that's what Paul preached, **Christ Crucified**. But the problem then, as it is today: such a message seems like foolishness!

Part I

That concept of free grace presented problems to the intellectual Greek minds of Paul's audience. The Gospel was too simple for them. These scholarly, learned men wanted something to challenge their intellect. In their opinion, religion should be something to reason out. There should be a rational explanation to all things, cut and dried principles to be applied in every situation. These people were philosophers- they looked for a wisdom which had nothing to with "the fear of the Lord."

And this is why "Christ Crucified" was complete foolishness to them. The very thought that God would send his only son to humble himself and take on human form, that this same son would die on a cross of criminals and his blood would rid the world of all guilt without us having to lift a finger? Foolishness! Any reasonable human being would have destroyed the world and started over after that first sin. Yet God wanted to save it? What a foolish thing God did, sending his own son to a criminal's death, for sinful human beings. At least this is how God's plan of salvation looked in the eyes of the Greeks.

But the problem today remains the same doesn't it? The sinful human mind is wired so that it cannot and does not want to hear the message of the Cross, because it's just not reasonable. And you hear that attitude reflected all around you! It says, "What's the big deal? A carpenter's son dies on a cross one Friday afternoon 2000 years ago...what is so special about that?"

We can still hear those Greeks laughing and ridiculing the foolishness of the Cross today. I sometimes come across TV shows that openly mock Jesus and his passion. You might hear of Christianity being called a psychological crutch in university classrooms. The preaching of

Christ Crucified? People are too busy, people are too "advanced" today to believe in such a thing.

But what about you? Is Christ Crucified a big deal to you? Are Jesus' footsteps up to Calvary which you follow during this season of Lent still significant for you? Or are you treating it as just another walk around the block, just another season that comes and goes once a year?

Does lent still bring you to your knees with sorrow over your sin which drove Jesus to the cross, but at the same time lift you up in the promise of forgiveness he won there for you?

Are you hiding the fact that you go to church on Wednesday nights because it might sound foolish to your co-workers? Or are you proudly embracing the preaching of Christ crucified like Paul, even with the prospect of being called naive and weak?

Even though we may not always show our appreciation for it, we know what Lent means for us...that a carpenter's son died on a cross one Friday afternoon 2000 years ago means everything!

This is why **We preach Christ Crucified!** Because God chose this foolish thing to make us wise for salvation. That's why we set quiet moments in our busy, hectic days to slow down and say thank you; to marvel again at our so-called "crutch," the "*wise thing which God did*" in Christ. It's why we enroll our children and grandchildren in school here at Trinity, why we send them to SS and VBS, that they might also attain the true wisdom which gives salvation. It's why we are dedicated to support and promote Christian education here through our school, why we give thanks for Christian teachers who fill the minds of our children with the spiritual wisdom which far outweighs all other kinds of knowledge. It's why we are all gathered here at this very moment: Not for worldly wisdom, but for **true wisdom in God's foolishness.**

True wisdom, God's wisdom, is not the intellect and brilliance of earthly minds which can be learned and shared on university smart boards. God reveals his wisdom to us in his Gospel. This is why **We preach Christ Crucified.** This is why we get on our knees and pray... Thank you Lord, "*Because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children...you have revealed them to me.*"

Part II

Paul would quickly realize that the Christ which he preached was not the Messiah the Jews were looking. We see that during Jesus' own ministry. Even after Jesus had performed countless miracles, fulfilling the OT prophecies before their very eyes, the Jews weren't content. "*What sign will you show us?*" they continued to say. Because the Jews wanted an earthly king to free them from the Romans and bring them back to earthly glory. They wanted signs from heaven which would equip their messiah to be a political ruler. They forgot that Jesus never made such promises, and neither did the OT prophets.

This is how the preaching of Christ Crucified had become a stumbling block for these Jews. It was literally a trip wire to a trap, and the Jews bit. By rejecting Christ as their promised messiah, these Jews would ensnare themselves in a trap of eternal death.

The trap is still set today, Christians. Sometimes we hear people pointing to worldly events or to happenings in their own lives as a sign from above. But do we ever fall into this trap? Maybe not directly, but we can subtly be looking for such “signs from God” without even realizing it. “God, if you love me, show me a sign and take away my health problems. God, if you really care, show me a sign and remove my debt. God, it seems like my prayers are flying up to nowhere, give me a sign by answering “YES.” If I am asking God for things like this, am I really looking for a sign? Or like the Jews, am I looking for a God who meets all of *my* preferences?

Like those Jews, many today would happily leave the cross standing all alone in the corner if it meant they could have some miracles and signs to improve their life now! They would trade the Christ who was crucified, for the Christ who keeps them out of the hospital, or gives them the winning numbers to the lottery; the one who ends all wars and brings world peace, rather than the one who gives them peace with God. The world still looks for a king who will satisfy them with all the things he can bring them today on this earth...but does not find one in the weak thing that God chose...the crucified Christ.

But this is the very reason why God chose such a weak thing, in Jesus, to redeem a world that loves wisdom and power! Yet so powerful was His choice!

It's the power which we so clearly see during these Sundays and Wednesdays of Lent. And it is another reason why we appreciate this season so much.

Because it's during lent that we get to focus on Jesus' walk to Calvary. And that's where we see so clearly the power of God's Grace; his amazing grace which moved him to send his one and only son Jesus down to this earth to take our place. We see God's power in his love. A love which drove Jesus, the God-man to the cross, where instead of coming down and revealing himself as God, stayed on that cross in order to endure the full punishment for the sins of the world. *Truly greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.* Finally, we see God's power in mercy; mercy which rescued us poor, undeserving sinners from the eternal punishment and death which we so deserved. Yes, **true power is found in God's weakness.** True power is found in Christ Crucified.

As we continue to make our way toward Holy Week, the cross is always on our minds. Paul reminds us today why that is. The cross is where we see *our* Lord, the cross is where we see *our* Jesus, crucified for *our* sins. And that truth alone makes the ***foolishness of God...wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of god...stronger than human strength.*** **We preach Christ Crucified**, because he alone makes us wise for salvation, through God's powerful grace.