

INI - SDG

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent

March 15, 2009

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church - CLC

Hecla, SD

**Text: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 *For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both the Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.***

Theme: WHAT DOES “CHRIST CRUCIFIED” MEAN TO YOU?

- Weakness or power?
- Foolishness or wisdom?

Dear fellow redeemed by Christ crucified,

We see them all over the place. Some people wear them around their neck. Some people have one or more hanging on a wall at their home. Some people have it tattooed on their shoulder, or back, or ankle. Some people have them in or on their car. Some people have them as fashion statements others for good luck charms. You can find several of them throughout our church building. I am, of course, talking about the symbol of the cross.

The crucifix was not always viewed in such a positive light though. In the days of Jesus the cross was a horrible, ugly thing to see. The cross was a tool of intimidation by the Roman Government. It was only associated with one thing - the cruel death of a criminal. It was a most horrible way to die. Death could take from a couple of hours to as much as a few days, depending on the method of crucifixion used and physical condition of the one being crucified. Causes of death could be asphyxiation from the weight of the body pressing on the chest of the criminal, infection from the nails driven through the hands and feet, or exhaustion from exposure. Typically, crucifixion was reserved for slaves, pirates, rebels, and particularly notorious criminals. Crucifixions would typically take place right outside the city gate as a sign of warning to those who had ideas of rebelling against the Roman Government to think again. The goal of crucifixion was not merely to kill the criminal, but also to mutilate and dishonor the body of the condemned and strike fear into all who saw it.

So as you can see, in Jesus' day the cross was viewed very differently than today. At the time of the Roman government it was an ugly, hideous, and terrifying thing. No one would want to carry around a miniature version of it on their neck or in their homes. But what does the cross mean to you? Why do you have crosses in your homes and in your bedrooms? And more importantly, what does “Christ crucified” mean to you? Is it weakness or power, foolishness or wisdom? This very important question can mean the difference between heaven and hell. Therefore may God grant us His Holy Spirit that we may rightly consider it.

**WEAKNESS OR POWER**

“Give us a sign!” Multiple times Jesus was asked to prove that He was who He said He

was by giving them a sign from heaven. Sometimes when we read Scriptures it seems that miracles were being done all the time. The Jews in the days of Jesus and Paul would have been very familiar with all the mighty acts that were done in the Old Testament - the plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, water from a rock, manna in the wilderness, the walls of Jericho tumbling down at the sound of a trumpet blast, Elijah calling down fire from heaven in his battle against the prophets of Baal, and the list could go on and on.

Now as the New Testament era begins, the Jews were no longer content with the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. They wanted signs and wonders from heaven. They wanted fire from heaven and manna to eat. They wanted a Messiah that would amaze them. One time when a group of Pharisees and teachers of the Law asked Jesus for a sign, He replied, ***“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”*** (Mt 12:39) Never mind that Jesus had caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, the mute to speak, and raised the dead to life - they always wanted more proof, more signs. This showed that they no longer knew the Word of God and accepted it when they heard it from the lips of Jesus. They would indeed receive a sign, the sign of Jonah. Even as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, so too Jesus, having been crucified, dead, and buried, would be in the belly of the earth for three days and rise again.

***“Jews request a sign,”*** Paul writes in our text. Not much has changed in 2,000 years. Although it is not just limited to the Jews who request a sign. Maybe you are like me and have times when you feel like if you could only see a sign from heaven, then you would be a better believer. Yet what we see with the Jews and Jesus is if the Word of God is not sufficient, not even raising a man from the dead will convince us of the truth.

The Jews wanted to be dazzled and mystified, but what they saw in Jesus neither dazzled nor mystified them. To most, not all, of the Jews, Christ crucified was a stumbling block. It was something they could not get past. They wanted a mighty earthly king, not a King nailed to a wooden cross. They wanted a Messiah who would meet their earthly needs, not one who would supply for their spiritual needs with forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. To them the cross was a sign of weakness and offense. They said as much to Jesus even as He suffered on the cross, ***“He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.”*** (Mt 27:42) Jesus being crucified was a sign of weakness, a sign of defeat.

But to those who are called, Paul says, even to the Jewish believers, Christ crucified is not a sign of weakness but rather it is ***“the power of God.”*** The believer does not see Jesus as a defeated king dying a criminal’s death, but instead the believer sees a loving Savior giving His life to save him from his sin. Christ crucified is the power of God because it is God carrying out every threat of punishment for sin. On the cross the LORD laid on Christ the iniquity of us all. There He removed His hand of blessing from Jesus and forsook Him on the cross. There Jesus tasted the anguish of hell in our place.

Christ crucified is also the power of God because what is given to those who have been called. Because of Christ crucified God has taken away all of our sins and all of our sorrow. Because of Christ crucified God is our Father in heaven and not an angry Judge waiting to punish us. Because of Christ crucified we need not fear death, because Satan has been crushed and heaven is our eternal home. To those who are called Christ crucified is the power of God.

Does Christ crucified mean weakness or power to you?

## FOOLISHNESS OR WISDOM?

I need you to fill in the blank here. “The people of \_\_\_\_\_ spend their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear something new.” What group of people would you say spend their time debating new thoughts and ideas? University professors? Cable news shows? The American people? People on the internet blogs? Wisdom and education are big things in our world. We are told that so many of this world’s problems could be eliminated if only people were more education. So we have sex education, health education, and drivers education. And yet, despite all this education and all this wisdom, we still continue to have wars, diseases, and death. What Solomon wrote is true, there is nothing new under the sun. Worldly wisdom has been held in high regard since the Garden of Eden. There the devil enticed Eve saying, “You too can be like God, *knowing good and evil.*” (*Gen 3:5*) Yet the wisdom of the world has not and cannot solve the problem of sin and death.

The fill in the blank statement I had actually comes from the book of Acts. When the Apostle Paul preached Christ crucified in the city of Athens he found a people who “*spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.*” (*Acts 17:21*) Athens was the center of Greek philosophy. Names like Plato and Aristotle emerged from this culture. They were thinkers. They were delighted to hear the Apostle Paul with this seemingly new message about a man named Jesus. They were willing to listen to Paul - until, that is, he began to speak of the resurrection of the dead. You see in their self determined wisdom, they had decided that the soul is not immortal so there is no life after death.

The “*Greeks seek after wisdom,*” Paul writes in our text. What does Christ crucified mean to them? It is a message of “foolishness.” Foolishness is a strong word. Think of the things which you call “foolish.” Scripture says, “*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.*” (*Prov 22:15*) Think of all the foolish things you or your children have done. It is foolish to stick the cat in the microwave. It is foolish to put a cape on and jump off the roof thinking you’ll float safely to the ground. The so-called wise and educated find the Gospel foolishness. To them it is foolish to think that every work necessary for man to be saved was accomplished by Jesus. To them it is foolish to think that man need do nothing to be saved but only to believe in Jesus. The wisdom of man has determined that man needs to do something - whether it is obeying commandments, volunteering at a homeless shelter, becoming a monk or nun, praying the perfect prayer, or choosing to accept Christ into their lives - these are things that the wise of this world have determined that if man does them, God will HAVE to accept them into His fellowship.

Has anything really changed since Paul visited Athens? No. Instead of just the Greeks seeking wisdom, the whole world is seeking wisdom. Our culture has an insatiable appetite for information. From 24 hour news channels and the internet, we can’t seem to get enough. And the message of Christ crucified continues to be foolishness. We are told that the Christian church of today needs to get beyond that and be relevant. Instead of preaching such a foolish message, the church should be spending it’s time correcting the “ills of society” such as racism and wars. To them, Christ crucified is foolishness.

“*But to those who are called,*” Paul writes even of the Greek believers, “*Christ...the wisdom of God.*” To the believer, Christ crucified is the wisest message ever heard. God saw all had sinned and fallen short of His glory, He knew man was unable to live up to His perfect standards, and He knew if He did not do something about it all men would be condemned to hell eternally. And so God in His wisdom sent His only begotten Son to accomplish salvation for

man. He sent His Son to live as a substitute for the sinner, keeping God's Commandments perfectly. He sent His Son to die as a substitute for the sinner, taking all sin on Himself and being punished in the place of man. God would accomplish man's salvation through Christ crucified and use the same message of Christ crucified to call sinners from the darkness of unbelief to the light of life. To those who are called, Christ crucified is the wisdom of God.

What does Christ crucified mean to you?

The cross means almost the exact opposite today, as it did before Jesus. Before Jesus it meant punishment and death. To those who are called, it means life and salvation. Before Jesus, it was a horrific symbol that struck fear in the hearts of people. To those who are called it is a beautiful reminder of God's love which comforts the believers heart. It is the power of God and the wisdom of God. May God be praised for that old, rugged cross on which He offered up His Son for our salvation! Amen.