

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
February 9, 2014
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (NIV)

Our part of the country drew attention from around the nation this last week. That's because, in case you missed it, there was a big debate at the Creation Museum. On one side you had the Creation Museum's founder Ken Ham defending the six day creation as taught in the Bible. On the other side was Bill Nye "the science guy" defending evolution and the teachings of Darwin and the Big Bang theory. Did many of you watch or listen in? I followed the live streaming on my computer and found it for the most part to be interesting. Of course you probably know I was already strongly on a certain side. If you listened to them debate you caught on very quickly that these are two very intelligent men. Both of them as scientists they knew their stuff and had plenty of practice presenting it.

Yet, after listening to them go back and forth I started to wonder if this was really making any difference. My guess is most people there had already drawn a line in the sand to what side they were on. Please understand I am not saying Ken Ham did wrong in trying to defend the Biblical account of creation. I also believe there is a place for apologetics – that is using human reason and discovery to combat human objections. What made me a bit uncomfortable, however, was when people talked about who won the debate. What is that based off of and how do people choose who won? What else could it be decided on other than the one who made the best argument, the one with the more persuasive words, the more skillful and clever debater?

As I was listening Katie remarked: "Dad, you should be debating that science guy." While that made me happy that my daughter thought I could go toe to toe with this brilliant scientist and even filled me with momentary pride, I began to think about these words from the apostle Paul. "*When I came to you...I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God...My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words.*" Instead, without listing his credentials, without flair for the dramatic, without any bells or whistles, without any power-point presentations, Paul came to them with the clear and simple Gospel of Jesus Christ. This had me thinking about the question I want God's Word to have us consider this morning: **With what do God's preachers come?**

One thing that is evident in these opening chapters of Paul's letter is that people in Corinth were impressed with wisdom. They held clever speakers in high regard. They placed a very high value on education and intelligence. They were even willing to pay a high price for a message spoken with eloquent and persuasive words. What they looked for in a preacher was

someone who could entertain, someone to dazzle them with his words, someone who could creatively come up with something new, someone who was a great and confident orator.

Yet, Paul reminds them that he was not any of these things. ***“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom.”*** Paul was the opposite of what many are looking for in a preacher. Please understand Paul was an intelligent and educated man, but Paul did not try to impress them with clever or persuasive words. He did not come to them confident his own style and powerful skills of rhetoric would win them over. On the contrary, Paul says: ***“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words.”*** After facing much rejection and meager success in Athens, Paul came to this great city of Corinth, known for its love for wisdom, with a whole lot of anxiety and uncertainty. He came in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. He needed the Lord’s reassurance, which he received, and which is recorded in Acts, where the Lord tells Paul: ***“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city”***(18).

Do we ever look for the same thing that many in Corinth did? Do we want a preacher who is wise and persuasive, someone who is eloquent and entertaining? Do we want someone who can use human reason and wisdom so that we can understand things on our own terms? Do we want to be razzled and dazzled? Do we want a preacher who pronounces every word right and not one who mistakenly says ‘ferocious” instead of ferocious wolves like your preacher? Do we want our faith and trust to be dependent upon our preacher’s clever words and high IQ? I sure hope not.

With what do God’s preachers come? They come not with wise and persuasive words. They come not to win people over with their cleverness, wisdom, or intellect. They come with weakness. They come with much fear and trembling. I know I do. I have many weaknesses. So often I feel like Moses asking: *“Who am I? Who am I to take your Word, O God, to your people?”* Do you feel the same way I do about preaching God’s Word to someone?

Although Paul came to them in Corinth in this way, Paul also came with what they needed most of all. There were many problems in Corinth Paul could have dealt with first – just read this letter! There were hot button topics Paul could have made his focus to keep their attention. But instead of trying to woo them by the way his words caught their ears, Paul wanted the message of the cross to win their hearts. ***“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*** Paul came to those wisdom loving, intelligence seeking people of Corinth with a message of foolishness – the message of the cross.

Paul faithfully taught them all about Jesus Christ. He showed from the Bible how Jesus is the Son of God and Son of Man. He pointed to Jesus as the sinner’s substitute. He talked about Jesus as their righteousness. He took them to the cross where the Lord laid on Jesus the sins of us all. Paul’s whole message centered on Christ-crucified! That is for good reason – for that is the only answer there is for sin – for our sin. That is the only way any sinner is able to stand before God forgiven – with sins washed away in Jesus’ blood. So Paul resolved to know nothing else while he was with them – except for ***“Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*** That isn’t to say that is all Paul taught them. He strived to teach them the whole will of God as we too recognize the importance of all of God’s Word. But Jesus was always at the center.

With what do God’s preachers come? They come with the same message of ***“Jesus***

Christ and him crucified.” There are a lot of hot button topics to preach on today. I understand each of us has certain problems and different troubles in our lives. But what each of you needs most of all is to know Jesus Christ and to understand what His cross means for you. God gives his preachers a pretty simple task when you think about it – every week my message is really the same. I want to preach Christ-crucified. I want to tell you how Jesus died for you and rose again. I want to show you your sins, so I can then show you your Savior. This gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

I thought about that again this week as I listened to that debate. God is the only one who changes hearts. Only the Holy Spirit works the faith to simply believe that the universe was formed by God’s command in a span of six days. Isn’t that a very good thing? Even if we can’t figure out with our human reason how it all happened, even if the guy on our side of the argument isn’t as eloquent or in the eyes of many loses the debate – our faith does “***not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.***” Paul saw a “***demonstration of the Spirit's power***” in Corinth as he preached not with wise and persuasive words but with the message of Jesus Christ. Corinth was perhaps his largest congregation. I look here and I also see a “***demonstration of the Spirit's power.***” I see people who believe not because of the preacher but because of the power of God. I see people who are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. I see people who look at the foolishness of the cross as the greatest wisdom of God.

During the debate, Bill Nye “the science guy” came at Ken Ham a couple times with a question. He said something like “you keep pointing at the past and using this ancient book written about 2000 years ago translated into English, but what can you actually predict?” I know it would have been off topic but I kind of wish Ken Ham would have answered: “*I predict you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds in glory with all His angels with Him. I predict the heavens and earth we spend so much time studying will disappear and be destroyed by fire. I predict every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. I predict there will be no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. I predict that all those who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out. I predict that because Jesus lives, I too will live!*”

I pray you see this is with what God’s preachers come. They come not with a confidence in themselves but a confidence in God’s Word – a Word that tells us all about Jesus Christ and him crucified. They come with the powerful tool the Holy Spirit uses to change hearts, minds, and lives. They come “***so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.***” There is no debate, my friends, for God will always have the last Word. Thank Jesus that He does! Amen.