

*The Third Sunday In Lent*  
March 15, 2009  
Amazing Grace Lutheran - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but 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. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (NIV)*

Look at this picture. (Picture on screen of Christ being crucified) It is a portrayal of Jesus on the cross. Look carefully and ponder on what happened to Jesus there. Then ask yourself what this means to you. What feelings do you have when you see a picture of Jesus on the cross? What emotions fill you when you hear the message of Christ-crucified? How do we view this event that took place over 2000 years ago?

Paul writes this letter to a church in the city of Corinth which was a place where people had all kinds of different opinions and feelings about what happened to Jesus on the cross. The same could be said of how people see the cross today. But as Jesus Himself might ask us this morning: “*What about you? Who do you say that I am?*” Listen to God’s message and then let us ask ourselves this question: **What do we think of Christ Crucified? A stumbling block and foolishness? Or the power and wisdom of God?**

Corinth was an influential city filled with both Jews and Greeks and had an estimated population of about 200,000 in Paul’s day. This big city had sports, trading, and commerce. Corinth was known for it’s philosophers and cultural attractions. This city also had a synagogue which Paul went to every Sabbath when he was there. For one and a half years Paul shared the good news about Jesus in this city. During that time I’m sure Paul witnessed many different reactions as he preached of Jesus dying for all people on the cross.

He writes: “*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.*” How did people view the message of the cross? The Jews demanded signs. They weren’t looking carefully at the signs the Old Testament pointed out for Jesus fulfilled all those. They did not want signs of grace and mercy from a healing, caring, forgiving, dying Christ. Jesus gave them plenty of those as well. Instead, they wanted spectacular signs from heaven, - signs their Messiah would make the Jewish people the top political power in the world again - signs that Jesus could be their bread King - signs they would be free from the Romans. The fact that Jesus was a nobody from Nazareth, that Jesus talked more about spiritual things, that Jesus was a suffering Messiah, that Jesus went to the cross to take away their sin - was a stumbling block to them. Many Jews tripped all over the message of Jesus as Savior. They refused the message of Christ crucified.

Then there were the Greeks. To the wise and educated philosophers the message of the cross was folly. What a ridiculous thing to have a religion centered around a Jew nailed to a tree! There was a picture that was said to have been put up in one of the pagan temples. Most believe it was made by a Roman soldier who was making fun of his

fellow soldier for being a Christian. There was a caption that read *Alexander worships his God*. Above it was a picture of a donkey being crucified on a cross. Many Greeks turned the message of Christ crucified into a laughingstock. To believe that Jesus shedding his blood on a cross means forgiveness, hope, peace, and certainly for eternal life to them was pure foolishness. They too refused the message of Christ crucified.

So what about us? Do we ever demand signs? Do we look for outward signals that God never promised? Do we ever want God to give us more when it comes to earthly things? Do we want our church not to focus so much on Christ crucified and get to preaching things that are more practical? Do we ever tend to place our wisdom above God's Word? Are we tempted to trust our reason? Do we ever, even for a moment see the cross of Christ as foolishness? Is the fact that Jesus shed his blood and died for us ever something we stumble over? The message of the cross really is kind of crazy, isn't it? To say that we have life with God, that we are forgiven, that we are going to heaven, all because Jesus was sacrificed and died about 2000 years ago on a cross is kind of foolish, is it not?

Not to some! Thankfully, it certainly is not foolish to us! For us "***Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God.***" Yes, for those who are perishing the cross is foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. That power was at work in Corinth as God called to faith a large church of believers who continued to gather around the Word to hear the message of Christ crucified.

Paul writes: "***For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.***" Literally, the Greek reads: "*the foolish thing God did,*" is wiser than man's wisdom, and "*the weak thing God did*" is stronger than man's strength. Humanly speaking to the world it seems pretty foolish that God would send His Son to live for sinners. It is foolishness to the world that Jesus, true God, would become also a true man so that wicked men could nail Him to a tree and kill Him. But the foolish thing God did was wiser than all of man's wisdom. In Jesus, God gives us a substitute who provides us the righteousness we need to live with God. In Jesus, God provided the perfect Lamb of sacrifice to pay our debt of sin.

To the world it seems like a weak thing when God allows His own Son to be arrested, and mocked, and beaten, and crucified. Jesus seemed pretty weak as He suffered the hell sins deserve and laid down His life at Calvary. But in this weak thing God did, we see God's strength to save sinners who all together did not have nearly the strength to save themselves. In the cross and empty tomb we see strength much stronger than man's, we see God's strength in providing salvation. We find a God who loves us so much that He would not be stopped until our sins were paid for, the devil was defeated, and heaven was opened. This is why to those who believe the message of Christ crucified is the wisdom and power of God.

That's why we too preach Christ crucified. Our message continues to be the same one Paul preached in Corinth. So what do we think of Christ crucified? Let me ask this: when we look in the mirror of God's law and we don't like what you see, when we know you have sinned against God and we deserve to be punished, when our guilt weighs us down, what do we think of Christ crucified? What do we think of Jesus being nailed to a cross to suffer our punishment? When we are standing by the graveside of a dear friend that falls asleep in Jesus, when we can hardly speak or sing through the tears, and when we hear Jesus say: "***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live,***

*even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die,” ( John 11)* then what do we think of Christ crucified? When we remember how fragile life is here on earth, when we know that God could put an end to this evil world at any moment, when we think of facing our own death and standing in judgment, then what do we think of Christ crucified?

Rejoice in the message of the cross, dear friends. Look at Jesus on the cross. Ponder at what Christ crucified means for you. It is the wisdom of God. It is the power of God. It is our life, our forgiveness, our hope, our peace, and our everything. By the Spirit's power may we always view it as such. Amen.