

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, look with favor on your humble servants and stretch out the right hand of your power to defend us against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

Sermon Text:

What are you looking for? I've been around long enough now that I know different people are looking for different things in life. Success is weighed by a number of different metrics. One person is looking for wealth, another great relationships, another great wisdom. What are you looking for? As Paul addresses the Corinthians Christians today, he provides a Christian metric for success in comparison to the world around him. As He does, He points us to something that outlasts wealth, relationships, even worldly wisdom when he announces **We Preach Christ Crucified**.

Of course, the message of Jesus crucified and risen is not what everyone is looking for. The why is spelled out for us by Paul in our lesson and it falls on both side of the narrow Lutheran, the narrow Biblical middle road. Paul says *Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom*.

The first stumbling block to a truly Christ centered view of the Scriptures is found in a complete misunderstanding of what Jesus came to do. Throughout Jesus ministry, our Savior must constantly combat this idea that He has come to be a Savior from worldly oppression. At the feeding of the 5000, Jesus must leave the masses gathered before Him because they want to make Him a bread king. In this view, Jesus has come to be the great provider. With Jesus on an earthly throne, they Jewish people would never need to work again. Instead, their meals, their needs, their very livelihoods would be taken care of by God. Humans would simply be the great consumers of the goods laid upon their doorsteps by means of the miracles Jesus would daily perform for them. Similar to it, is the view that Jesus would come and break the power of Rome. He would come and put an end to the earthly oppression that the people so regularly face and endure in their everyday lives. Again, my means of His miraculous power, He would cast out Rome and provide a kind of spiritual Shangri la where every law conformed to the commands of God and the consequences of sin would be swiftly met with the same power which would readily drive out Rome.

The other side ditch, on the other side of narrow middle is the wisdom of the world. This one is most readily seen in the Greeks who fancy themselves to be enlightened minds of the world around them. Think Paul in the Areopagus elegantly arguing the need for a real God among the plethora of false gods worshiped by such a people. Enlightenment is a truly interesting study, mainly because it is so often anything but. The Romans embraced ever form of sin from the slaughter of their fellow human beings in coliseums for the enjoyment and appeasement of the people to rampant fornication which would rival our world today and, in many cases, leave us blushing because of the truly immoral application of it. Enough words can justify just about anything from the crazed immorality we just highlighted to turning God's own house into a marketplace more focused on profit and loss than the souls that freely moved about it.

In it all, it is good for us to pause and realize that neither miracles nor wisdom are inherently evil but when they lose their moral moorings in Christ and His holy Word the quickly swerve into the deep ditches of sin on either side. Can we apply this to our world and the people who live in it today? Of course, we can. All too easily, in fact.

Just listen to most of what we would consider Christian thought chattering from television screens and often following our own services online. From televangelists who have ruined God's name in the

Text:1 Corinthians 1:22-25

²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. – NIV84

attempt to build empires of wealth at the expense of their parishioners to an infatuation with the so-called wisdom of our day which is so devoid of the word that it can't even tell the simple difference between boys and girls any longer. In all of it, the ten commandments of the first lesson have been turned at best into the ten suggestions and at worst the defunct ideas of a long bygone era unworthy of a place at the table of real wisdom, science, or thought. As the visible churches of our day imbibe from this satanic chalice, they end up looking as devoid and empty as the temple itself which required Christ's righteous anger to overturn tables and clear a space for the gentiles to worship once again. Watch the news for five minutes and when you find yourself shaking your head, it's probably because every story seems to come from the ditches of depravity dug on either side of God's truth which has become a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, garbage to the world around it.

But then we would be sadly mistaken to think that such thinking has not invaded our own hearts and minds. Lazy Christianity no longer wants to speak up for the fear of being called a bigot as the ways of our world which we so often shake our heads at have in many cases slowly eroded our own thinking when it comes to the truth. Would our world even be contemplating something like an Equality Act today, if moms and dads had sat little Johnny or Jane down for a few seconds to talk about what a good and healthy marriage looked like instead of abandoning it when times were tough and exposing them to some of the very worst behavior of Christians in some of their own homes? Does such a thing build up a Christian world view or dismantle it? And before we get to judgmental there, what about the language, the examples, the lives that we set before the world on a regular basis? Do we show our families or the world looking in on our Christianity something different, or something that is sadly all too familiar? I am ashamed to admit that if you went over my life with a fine-toothed comb, I'm not so certain Paul couldn't easily swap Jews and Greeks with Michael Kampman at will.

Ah, but when we find that the Sedan of my sinfulness has left me crumpled in the ditches of the world, God is all too willing to shine His grace once again. And how does that happen? He opens His mouth. God's Word is the wrecker that hauls us up out of the mire of sin and back onto the narrow middle road once again. Paul wrote, *but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* ²⁵ *For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*

That very thing which the world would call folly and weak is the very thing we need. Christ and Him crucified. When we were powerless to fix any of this on our own, God set aside his power and might and came not in miracle but in mercy, not so that we could praise Him for His wisdom but that He might endure our woe. He took all of our sin upon Himself. He endured the full punishment for all our so-called wisdom and strength. In the cross, the very symbol of defeat we see our victory and in His anguished cries we hear of our freedom.

Focused on this love which God so freely displayed for us, we are filled with great wisdom than this world can contemplate and more impressive power than even the feeding of 5000. Having overturned the tables of sin in our own hearts, we have been freed and enabled to live in the light of God's Word. And this not so that we can set up earthly thrones and purge the world of sin and vice, but that we can walk down into the mire and the muck of it and teach others of the precious truth that has forever changed us, which can change them, which will one day carry us into the heights of heaven. We do it not by joining in the sin, but by embracing our Savior through God's gift of faith. We take His word seriously and others see it, note it, hear it in the simple everyday actions of God's children.

What are you looking for? What are you chasing after in this world of ours? It's a worthy question in any season but perhaps especially fitting in the season of Lent. God's still speaking ... no the world will not always like what it hears but that's all the more reason to keep on preaching Christ and Him Crucified. Not that won't mean a billion in the bank and the accolades of the academic communities of our world. It won't even allow us to perform miracles the rival those of Moses in Egypt, but that's okay. It was never the point. What is, so it turns out, is the heaven which Christ has secured for you, for me, for others by His work, His perfection, His cross and so dear Christian **WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED!** Amen.