

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
February 2, 2014
I Cor. 2:1-5

In Christ Jesus, who is the heart and core of our faith and of our preaching, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Two weeks ago we heard from the Apostle Paul that a Christian congregation is not made up of the worldly wise, influential and mighty, but of the foolish, weak and lowly who boast alone in Christ and believe that in Jesus they have righteousness, holiness and redemption. That spoke to all of us.

It is remarkable how much we have in common with the people of Paul's day. Even with all of our technological advances we are not much different, people are still people, sin is still sin and still prevalent everywhere and grace is still grace, and it alone saves through Jesus.

Well this morning's sermon text speaks to all of us as well, but especially to me as your pastor, as your under shepherd to the Good Shepherd Jesus. Even as we have much in common with the people of Paul's day, we pastors should have much in common with Paul's preaching.

This morning's theme again is a question:

WHAT DOES GOD EXPECT OF A CHRISTIAN PASTOR'S SERMON?

I: NOT THE WISDOM OR ELOQUENCE OF THE PREACHER, BUT

II: THE MESSAGE THAT IS PREACHED--CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED

Paul came to Corinth after spending some time in Athens. Athens was the center for worldly philosophy and higher education. In Athens Paul proclaimed the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. What happened? The majority of those learned people rebuked him and said, **WHAT DOES THIS BABBLER WANT TO SAY?** When Paul simply proclaimed to them that all of their so-called gods were but gold, silver and stone statues made by their hands and that the one true creator God sent His Son Jesus to suffer and die for all of mankind's sin and that this Jesus was raised again from the dead; we are told that some mocked Paul, others politely said, **WE WILL HEAR YOU AGAIN ON THIS MATTER** and left, never intending to come back. Only a very few were brought to faith and followed Jesus.

No doubt there was some joy in Paul's heart as he saw the result of the Spirit's work on the hearts of a few. But there probably was more than a little disappointment and sadness, for the simple Gospel message met with such little success. Paul's message did not match up with the intellectuals; his message was not sophisticated enough for them.

One can imagine how Paul felt as he approached the much larger city of Corinth, about 40 miles to the east. The city of Corinth was more of a working man's city compared to Athens' cultural arts; but the Corinthians did hold the eloquent, gifted speaker in high regard. The skillful debater, the clever orator was not only admired but in many cases idolized, kind of like sports stars, singers and movie stars today. The Corinthians wanted this world's wisdom presented to them with persuasive words and flowery language in an impressive, dynamic way.

So here comes Paul. Did he change his message? Did Paul feel that because of his meager success in Athens, the simple Gospel just wouldn't do for these learned Greeks steeped in philosophy and higher learning? Would he try to win them by playing up to their desire in eloquent, learned presentations, clever debates and words that only the wisest could understand?

No! Paul clearly says in our text this morning: **AND I, BRETHREN, WHEN I CAME TO YOU, DID NOT COME WITH EXCELLENCE OF SPEECH (ELOQUENCE) OR OF WISDOM DECLARING TO YOU THE TESTIMONY OF GOD...MY SPEECH AND MY PREACHING WERE NOT WITH PERSUASIVE WORDS OF HUMAN WISDOM...**

As a speaker Paul was just the opposite of the Athenian philosophers. He preached simple sermons. He was no pulpit orator that people would flock to see. He would not be listed in the top ten preachers of his day. He didn't try to dazzle his hearers by turning the simple Gospel into impressive wisdom. No, Paul was low-key in his pulpit style. Yet he was not boring, he was forceful and determined. He had a good reason for appearing before these Corinthians in such an unimposing

way. Paul says: **FOR I DETERMINED NOT TO KNOW ANYTHING AMONG YOU EXCEPT JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED.**

He wanted his hearers to fix their ears, eyes, and hearts upon the crucified and risen Christ, not on himself, Paul the great orator. They were to concentrate and cling to the simple Gospel message, not some worldly wisdom that Paul might have to offer. This is not to say that Paul was incapable of eloquence. He was a very intelligent and well educated man. When you read his letters that he wrote we see that Paul knew well how to present wisdom effectively: **God's WISDOM IN CHRIST!**

But Paul knew it was not how he preached, but **what** he preached that would make a difference in the lives of these Corinthian people. He did not want followers because his fancy words caught their ears, but because the simple message of sin and grace, the simple message of the cross of Christ, caught their hearts.

In these verses Paul is reflecting back upon his early ministry among this people. He had not come with a pompous attitude, flaunting his education as a learned Pharisee, flexing his oratorical muscles in order to awe and inspire the crowd; rather Paul came in weakness, in fear and in much trembling. Paul was not overdramatic here, he was not exaggerating.

In Acts 18:9-10 we are told that Paul was in need of special assurance from the Lord to strengthen him and encourage him in his ministry. We read: **NOW THE LORD SPOKE TO PAUL IN THE NIGHT BY A VISION, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, BUT SPEAK, AND DO NOT KEEP SILENT; FOR I AM WITH YOU, AND NO ONE WILL ATTACK YOU TO HURT YOU; FOR I HAVE MANY PEOPLE IN THIS CITY."**

Paul knew why his preaching met with success in Corinth. It was not because of him, but because his speech and his preaching were, as he wrote in our text; **IN DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT AND OF POWER.** God the Holy Spirit was responsible for the success of his ministry and of every pastor's ministry. It was the Spirit who opened the hearts that were closed to the truth of the Gospel. It was the Holy Spirit who moved and quickened their hearts so that they received with joy and faith what they had once despised and scorned. Only the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel could make these wise Greeks see the foolishness of their former worldly wisdom and to believe the "foolishness of God" to be real wisdom. It was not Paul's wise and persuasive words that brought about this miracle of conversion, but the Holy Spirit's work.

Why did and does God do it this way? Paul writes: **SO THAT YOUR FAITH SHOULD NOT BE IN THE WISDOM OF MEN BUT IN THE POWER OF GOD.**

Man's wisdom cannot make people into believers. Only God's wisdom and power can do that. And that power is the Gospel. The simple Gospel message of a God who so loved this sin-filled world, this world of sinful people, that He sacrificed His own Son. That is what the people of Corinth got out of Paul's sermons. And that is what God expects of a Christian pastor's sermon:

**I: NOT THE WISDOM OR ELOQUENCE OF THE PREACHER, BUT
II: THE MESSAGE THAT IS PREACHED--CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED**

When Paul first came to Corinth he saw many problems facing the people. There were social, economic, educational and political problems. Which problem was Paul going to deal with first? As we heard from Paul himself, he determined to deal with the one problem that had eternal consequences, the one problem that affected all of the people. He confronted the people with their relationship to God. The citizens of Corinth first needed to know their sins and then they needed to know their Savior, Jesus Christ. They needed to know they were lost but Jesus was their Savior who came to deliver them from their lost condition. And that is the same message that is needed today, some almost 2,000 years later.

As your pastor I see the problems of society: the breakdown in the family, the poor relationships between husbands and wives; between parents and children; between employers and employees; the evils of drug and alcohol abuse and the damage it does to lives and families; the lack of respect for authority; the temptation of prosperity and riches as well as the despair of poverty; the almost complete disregard of God's unchanging morals regarding sex and marriage, divorce and adultery; the allurements of society to live only for the moment and for the pleasures and joys of the moment and of this world; the selfishness of this Me-generation; the false teaching that all religions are good and we should all get together as one people worshiping these many gods, the evolutionistic and

humanistic teaching that pervades our public schools. All of these problems and more affect us. How do we attack them?

The same way Paul did! With the one message the world does not have and needs most. Every problem just mentioned involves sin and or false teaching; involves man's stubborn rebellion against God; man's refusal to live according to God's Word.

The ultimate authority in our life and in the life of every individual is the God who made us. But the selfish old Adam in us rebels and selfishly chooses his own way. That is why we have so many problems, struggles, quarrels, disagreements, so much loneliness, depression and despair in our lives. The answer? Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

The Holy Spirit takes a hold of the heart of the individual and leads him from the lost condition of spiritual death into spiritual life. The Holy Spirit through the Good News of Jesus takes a person who is empty and fills him with God's love. The Holy Spirit through the Gospel leads us out of darkness into the light of salvation. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: **I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD TO SALVATION FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES.**

This, the Good News of Jesus come to live, to die and to rise again for us, is the power of God that works in our children, in the ungodly, in the simple minded as well as in the learned, in us as members of this congregation.

So what should we be expecting to hear when we come to church? What should we get out of the sermon? What does God expect?

The shepherds went to the manger to see **A SAVIOR WHICH IS CHRIST THE LORD.** The wise men came looking for the **NEWBORN KING.** Simeon waited and watched for **THE LIGHT TO LIGHTEN THE GENTILES AND THE GLORY OF HIS PEOPLE ISRAEL; GOD'S SALVATION TO ALL OF MANKIND.**

We should not look for, nor does God expect a pastor in the pulpit who speaks from his own wisdom, or who applies the wisdom and philosophies of this world to our lives or tells great stories. We should not look for one, nor does God expect a pastor who will tell us what we want to hear, but one who will tell us what we need to hear. We need and God expects a pastor who preaches the Word of God in its entirety.

Paul knew what the people wanted to hear, but he also knew what the people needed to hear. Many parishioners would be glad to have a pastor who never touches a guilty conscience, who only praises them and speaks of man as capable of accomplishing whatever he sets his mind to, who talks about self-esteem and self-advancement and self-love. But then we would never be led to see our sins, our miserable lost condition by nature and we would never be led to repent of them and know all that Jesus has done for us.

When the Law and the Gospel is clearly and simply proclaimed, the sinner, now redeemed, will have reason to rejoice and praise God from the heart. One cannot appreciate the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus if one is not convinced of his need for salvation. If you don't believe you are lost, what joy is there in being told you are found. If you don't believe you are dead in sin, what good is to tell you that you are alive in Christ?

Only then, when the Law convicts and the Good News of a Savior slain for us is preached, only then will the spiritual life that is refreshed and revitalized in church, go forth into the rest of the week. If we are to live like Christians the rest of the week, we must have our spiritual needs met, our spiritual batteries recharged on this first day of the week with God's powerful Word.

When it comes to the success of preaching the Word, I as your pastor and you as members can take comfort in the fact that it is the Holy Spirit who is responsible for that, not us! We need to remember that true success from the pulpit is not found in the power, prestige or persuasiveness of the speaker but in the speaker's faithfulness to God's Word and in the hearer's faithful response to the message that is heard: Christ and Him crucified.

I came across this statement concerning Christian preaching. It applies so well to our text this morning. **“Preach Christ and Him crucified! Let the cross shine in all its glory. Also present the truth about sin, setting it forth as the great and terrible evil that it really is, as the one thing which merits God's wrath and endless sufferings in the pit of hell! Present Jesus as the Son of God and the world's Savior, who laid down His life on Calvary in order to reconcile sinful man**

unto God! Set forth faith as the means by which we lay hold of Jesus and His salvation and by which we come to everlasting life. Any sermon, which does not present these first principles of our Christian religion, any sermon that would bypass the cross of Jesus and tell the people that God loves them apart from Christ's redemption on the cross is missing its goal. In fact, it cannot be classified as a Christian sermon." That is what God expects in a Christian pastor's sermon.

May the success of the glorious Gospel preaching here at Peace Thru Christ be clearly seen in the faithful response of our hearts, in our daily lives, and in the willing service to the Lord and in loving service to each other.

Amen.