

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan
The Third Sunday in Lent
March 8, 2015
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.

Do you know someone who immediately doubts or questions a spectacular story you tell them? Someone who won't believe you unless it is on their terms or according to their test? Someone who says to you, "I'll believe it when I see it."? You might try to describe the ice shoves which happened last spring in Menominee to them. You try to explain to them that the ice was piled up in huge mounds which were almost 25 feet tall and they seemed to stretch on for a half a mile.

You could tell the story with as much enthusiasm as possible. You could show them pictures, newspaper articles and video. You could do everything in your power to prove these shoves actually happened, but all you get in response is a look which says, "Really? Ice piled up 25 feet in the air? I'll believe it when I see it." Do you know someone like this? I do and I'm sure some of you right now are smiling to yourselves because you know people like this too.

If you know someone like this or can relate to what I am talking about than it means you will be able to understand what the apostle Paul is talking about in our lesson today. Paul is writing his letter to the church in Corinth. It is his first letter to this church which he founded on his second missionary journey. He wrote this letter to deal with some issues in the church which he had heard about and to answer some questions which the Corinthians had for him.

One of the issues Paul talks about in the opening verses is the way believers and unbelievers think about Jesus. Our lesson comes from this section of the letter. He starts the discussion a few verses before our lesson where he says, **"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."** He says there are two ways to think about Jesus: you think Jesus is either a fool or your savior.

Our lesson shows us Paul's opinion playing out in the real world. **"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."** Paul shows us the opposing groups. On one side are the Jews and Gentiles who are unbelievers and on the other side are the Jews and Gentiles who are believers.

The first group he mentions is Jewish unbelievers. He says, **"Jews demand miraculous signs (and Christ crucified is) a stumbling block to Jews."** Paul knows Jewish history and desires. Seeing is believing for them. He knows the miraculous signs which the Jews demand are much like the 10 plagues which freed them from slavery in Egypt. He knows the Jews wanted a savior who would use miracles like the plagues to bring the Roman government to its knees and set up an independent Jewish nation.

However, he knows that Jesus doesn't provide big and miraculous signs. He doesn't reduplicate the 10 plagues which bring a government to its knees. This doesn't mean Jesus didn't perform miracles. He did, but the miracles he performs have a different purpose. They help confirm Jesus is God's son who came into this world to reverse the curse of sin. He reversed the curse of sin by becoming obedient to his father's will which demanded he sacrifice himself on a cross for the sins of the world.

This plan was madness to the Jews. This wasn't the messiah they pictured or wanted. This is why Paul says, **"we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews."** Jesus is a stumbling block to Jewish pride.

They didn't want a savior from sin. They wanted a savior in their image who fulfilled their tests for him and they rejected Jesus when he didn't fit their image of a savior. It is a sad and stunning reminder what can happen to people who call themselves God's people.

Could this happen to us? Would we ever reject Jesus because he doesn't fit our image of a savior? I have run into people like this. People who are like the people I mentioned in my introduction. People who are like the Jews who Paul mentions. People who set up a test for Jesus and reject him when Jesus doesn't pass their test because he doesn't match their image of a savior. Have you ever set up a test for Jesus to be the savior you want rather than need?

Jesus, I will know you are my savior if you let me win the lottery. Jesus, I will know you are my savior if the girl says yes. Jesus, I will know you are my savior if my loved one gets better. Jesus, I know you're my savior if you give me the right sign. Have you ever been tempted to pray like this? Guilty, because this is the prayer of pride. It is the same pride the Jews had and what will be the result? **"Jews demand miraculous signs (and Christ crucified is) a stumbling block to Jews."**

It is a stumbling block for us. It will trap us in an endless cycle and keep us from ever seeing the savior we need. What will break this endless cycle? **"We preach Christ crucified: Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."** The only thing which can break our endless cycle of pride is the message of Christ crucified. Jesus shows us the power and wisdom of our God. Our pride cannot and will not provide us with a savior. In fact, our pride doesn't think we need a savior.

However, God in his wisdom points out to us our need for a savior. How does he do this for us? Think back to our Old Testament lesson. It was the 10 Commandments. God uses these commandments as a mirror to show us our sin. He wants us to look into this mirror and see we have failed him again and again. He wisely uses his law to crush our pride. Yet, God in his wisdom isn't done. He promised to send his son to keep these commandments in our place.

This is exactly what Jesus has done. Jesus kept God's commandments for us. He fulfilled each one of them for every single time we failed to do so. He showed us the wisdom of God by being the savior we needed from sin. **"We preach Christ crucified: Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."** Christ crucified is the power of God which declares us innocent in his sight. Christ crucified is our hope, because he didn't stay dead. He rose and displayed the full power of God by his resurrection.

Christ crucified is the wisdom of God. Who would've ever come up with the plan that God would become man in order to die? None of us would have ever come up with this plan. It is nuts. It is crazy to our thinking. God becoming one of us and dying in one of the worst possible forms by being crucified on behalf of people who are rebelling against him. Does this sound right to you? Does this sound sane? Yet, this is exactly what Jesus has done for us.

This reality is enough to make one's head spin and it brings us back to Paul's opening argument: you either think Jesus is a fool or your savior. **"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."**

This brings us back to the second group Paul mentions today: the Greeks. The Greeks of Paul's day were the intellectual elite of their day. They were the top of the food chain. We could compare them to the professors who teach at Harvard or MIT or the students who go there. They would be people like Bill Gates or Steve Jobs. They would be the real life version of the scientists you see on the tv show "The Big Bang Theory."

What did these elite Greeks think about the message of Christ crucified? **"Greeks look for wisdom (and Christ crucified is) foolishness to Gentiles."** They laughed at it. They thought it was stupid. Why on earth would God become man and why on earth would he die the death of a slave on behalf people who were rebelling against him? It made no sense and it sounded so stupid. No sane person would ever do this or come up with this plan.

It doesn't take much effort to find people today who think the message of Christ crucified is foolishness. You encounter them at work. You might have teachers who think this or fellow students. You might have friends and family members who believe this. Your faith in Jesus will get you laughed at. It will get you mocked and ridiculed. Why do these things happen to us? It is because the message of Christ crucified is foolishness to the unbeliever and they think you are stupid for following him.

What should you do when the mockery and ridicule start to get to you? Remember the promise Paul makes to us today. **"For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."** The message of Christ crucified is foolish only to the unbeliever because it is impossible for the unbeliever to understand the seriousness of sin. The unbeliever doesn't care about sin because it doesn't exist in their minds. It doesn't need to be paid for.

However, believers know different. We know sin is incredibly serious and it is impossible for us to pay God back for the sins we have committed. This is where the foolishness of Christ crucified kicks in. What the sinful mind calls stupid and foolish is what God calls wise. God in his wisdom did not demand the impossible from us. He demanded it from Jesus. Christ accomplished what was impossible for us through his death on the cross because he saved us from our sins.

This is foolishness and utter nonsense to the unbelieving world, but it is life and salvation to the believer. This is why we preach Christ crucified. Christ crucified is what we cling to with all of our might. It is what we are willing to give up everything in this world to keep hold of and never let go. We preach Christ crucified because he is the wisdom and power of God for the salvation of all who believe. We preach Christ crucified because he is our salvation. Amen.