

20 February 2013  
Lent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“The Crucified Lamb of God”

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:21-25 (Luke 18:31-34; Isaiah 49:1-7)

Last week, we began our Lenten meditation of the hymn *Lamb of God, Pure and Holy* (LSB #434) by considering that Jesus is the pure and holy one who came to make us who are impure and unholy, pure and holy again. Tonight we turn our attention to the next phrase in the hymn: *who on the cross didst suffer*.

Now, when it comes to the cross, it seems that there are two basic attitudes of man - natural, sinful man, that is: either we don't get it, or we don't want it.

In the first category are the twelve. We heard tonight from St. Luke that after Jesus explained to them that He would be **delivered over to the Gentiles, mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon, flogged and then killed, and on the third day rise . . . they didn't get it**. Now, Jesus didn't use the word *cross* there, but He didn't have to. That's what it meant in those days to be handed over to the Gentiles, the Romans - death by the torture of crucifixion. And look at how Luke explains how the twelve just didn't get it - he repeats it three times, using three different phrases to drive the point home! He says: **they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said**. And that is so because the cross doesn't fit the way we think - it is the round peg of the Gospel which we cannot fit into the square hole of our fallen minds.

In the second category are those whom St. Paul calls **the Jews and Greeks - those who demand signs and seek wisdom**. They don't want the cross because they are looking for a God who “wows” people - either by awe-inspiring signs, or by superior wisdom. Awe-inspiring signs could be good things like miracles or winning the lottery, or bad things like natural disasters or even terrorist acts, that those who are looking for signs then interpret as either God's favor or God's judgment. And superior wisdom is looked to for those who want God to be like a famous scientist at a respectable cocktail party, patiently fielding questions from his admiring fans, translating highly complex mysteries of the universe into language that makes perfect sense to human logic.

But consider these things for a moment. First, just because we don't get something, just because it doesn't make sense to us, doesn't make it not true. I remember not really “getting” poetry in English class or lots of things in Physics - yet those things are true. And second, when it comes to signs, how do you interpret them? The news

is filled with accounts of people for whom winning the lottery created all kinds of trouble, and others for whom getting something like cancer was a great blessing. The truth is, we don't often know what's good and what's bad; what is beneficial for us and what will hurt us. And there's much more to life than wisdom. Many very wise people have gone mad, and who can figure out love?

All of which means our ways don't work. Our ways to God, our ways to know God, our ways to please God, don't work. From Adam and Eve to you and me today, all our efforts and wisdom lead to and wind up dead and in the grave.

And so contrary to what we get and what we want, there is what God does. And what God does seems foolish, because it's not what we would have done; because to many, it seems beneath a wise and powerful God. *He does the cross.* The Father sends His Son to be the Lamb of God. To be weak, not strong. To serve, not be served. To lay down His life for the life of a foolish, messed up, sinful world. To join us who are dead in our trespasses and sins, that we be made alive with Him in the forgiveness of our sins and rise with Christ to a new life.

And so Jesus didn't come as a wise man, though He did amaze many with His wisdom. He didn't come as a conquering hero, though He did rescue many from sickness, disease, and demons. He didn't come to wow the world with awesome deeds, though He did astonish many with His miracles. And He didn't come as an example to show us how to do it, though He is an example of God's love and life. No, the Son of God came to go to the cross. He came to bear our sins and die our death. He came to take our place so that we could have His place. The Life of the world came to die, that we who die might live again.

Now that's foolishness to a world which believes *you break it, you bought it; you made your bed, now sleep in it; you got yourself into this mess, now you get yourself out it.* That's how we think. That's what we demand. That's what makes sense to us. Every man for himself.

But, St. Paul tells us tonight, ***the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*** Now, think about what he's saying there. Think of the wisest person you know, or know about. Of all the people in the world, who's at the top of that scale? . . . And Paul's saying that God's foolishness is above that. It's interesting - we don't seem to have any problem thinking of God's *strength* that way. That if you think of the strongest man who ever lived that, of course, God is stronger than that! But when it comes to wisdom . . . we're not so quick to submit. To acknowledge that God knows better than us what's best for us, what's right for us, what's necessary for us. That God's "foolish" way, that seems upside-down and inside-out and backwards to us, may not be so foolish after all. That when God says the way to life is through the cross, through the death and

resurrection of Jesus, it is.

And best of all, for God it's not every man for himself, *it's this man for everyone!* For as Isaiah said, this man, Jesus, came not just to save Israel, but to save the world. To die for all that all may live. Even the worst, lowest, dirtiest, smelliest, no good, wretched, miserable, maggot sack of a sinner like Paul, like you, and like me. For surely, we're not worth it, our hearts say. Yes, you're not worth it, the world says. But the cross cries out to you, yes! Yes, you are worth it. See how your Father loves you.

That's why Paul said ***we preach Christ crucified***. To those who don't get it and to those who don't want it. We preach Christ crucified because that is the wisdom of God. We preach Christ crucified because that is the only thing in this world that can save. We preach Christ crucified, we baptize into Christ crucified, we give Christ crucified in His Supper, we absolve in the name of Christ crucified. For only in Christ crucified is there forgiveness and life. Only in Christ crucified can you see how much God loves you.

And when through that preaching the Spirit works in your heart repentance for your sin and faith in your Saviour, then the Lamb of God becomes your Lamb of God, who on the cross didst suffer *for you*.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.