

13 September 2017
Holy Cross Day

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

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“We Preach Christ Crucified”

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 12:20-33

We preach Christ crucified.

You can almost hear the complaints that caused Paul to write these words and the verses that we heard today to the folks in the Corinthian church.

Paul, all you talk about is Jesus on the cross. All you talk about is forgiveness. All you talk about is Jesus dying, Jesus in the tomb, Jesus rising. *Blah, blah, blah*. We’ve heard it. How about some real wisdom talk, like the Greeks in town do. They talk about all kinds of interesting things and supernatural possibilities. They discuss all the latest spiritual books that come out, and you should see the crowds *they* get! Or, do some signs to attract some people, Paul. That’ll bring ‘em in! You know, give the people what they want, Paul. Especially the Jews. They keep talking about all the signs God gave them - you know, the manna and the plagues and the bronze serpent on a pole and all that. Some signs now would go a long way. So how ‘bout it, Paul? A little more wisdom, a few more signs!

Paul could have done that. As far as wisdom goes, Paul was a student second to none. He learned from the best. He was a Pharisees’ Pharisee. Ask him a question and he knew the answer. He could debate with anyone. And signs? Paul could do those too. Luke reports in the book of Acts some of the signs he did.

And yet here, he would not. In Corinth, a very culturally and religiously diverse city, he would not rely on rhetoric, he would not satisfy the desire for signs, he would not indulge in the spiritual topic and fascination of the day. ***We preach Christ crucified***, he insisted. In fact, just a few verses after what we read today, he said it even stronger: *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified* (1 Corinthians 2:2). This is all you will hear from me. That may be a ***stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles***, but this is the wisdom of God for the salvation of all people. Wisdom cannot save. Signs cannot save. But Christ crucified can. This message is greater than anything else I could say or do.

Though it doesn’t seem like it, right? Then, *or* now. People would rather discuss the latest best-selling book about someone’s spiritual speculations, even if they contradict the Scriptures. Or, see some cool and spectacular signs - healing, speaking in tongues, or even the sign of having a big church with lots of followers. But talk about Jesus on the

cross? Sin? Forgiveness? *Blah, blah, blah.* We've heard it. We want something else.

But as Paul would say: there is nothing else. ***We preach Christ crucified.*** If that is not our message, we are not being the church. If that is not our message, then you are not hearing what you need to hear. If that is not our message, then we are giving you nothing but false hope.

For you're a sinner. You may not like to hear that, but you need to. You're not a good person. Even if you look good on the outside, inside you're filled with all kinds of deep, dark, I-hope-no-one-finds-out-about-these sins. Me, too.

And you need forgiveness. Not the easy kind, where you let yourself off the hook with excuses, explanations, and self-justifications, but the real kind. Someone to die the death your sins require, so that you don't have to die for them; so that you be set free. That kind of forgiveness. Signs can't do that. Wisdom can't do that. Only Christ crucified can.

So ***we preach Christ crucified***, Paul said. Because Christ crucified is ***the power of God and the wisdom of God.*** For Jesus on the cross wasn't Jesus being weak - it Jesus showing His strength! The strength of His love for you, and the strength of bearing all the sin of all the world. And Jesus on the cross isn't foolishness - it is the highest wisdom of God. For who in this world would have thought of that as the solution to the world's sin? Who would have come up with God sending His only-begotten, perfect, dearly loved Son to be our substitute? To trade places with us? To be condemned so the condemned could be forgiven? Sounds foolish, until you know He did that **for you**. Not just for the world, but **for you**. For your sin, your guilt, your rebellion, your anger, your grudges, your lust, your pride, your temper, your ingratitude, your selfishness, your failures, your hatred, and more. A wise God knew there was no way for you to deal with all that yourself. Actually, you can't even deal with one of them! So He sent His Son. **For you**. And you need to know that.

So ***we preach Christ crucified.*** And for this reason too: it is the glory of God. Monday was the 16th anniversary of the 9-11 terrorist attacks. And not only were the civilian victims of the attack remembered, but so were the first responders who gave their lives trying to save others. They are remembered for their glorious self-sacrifice. How much more our heavenly Father who gave His Son. And the Son who came and laid down His life for all people. Who would not ask His ***Father*** - as we heard - ***to save Him from this hour***, but who came to do this very thing. To die so that many could live. To die and be buried like a seed in the ground, from which He would rise and grow into a church that would last through the ages and live forever.

And He did. That's the kind of God you have. A glorious one. Not one who sits up in heaven, issuing demands and seeing who can be good enough to make it to Him. But one who comes here to you, does what you cannot, and takes you with Him to life again.

So *we preach Christ crucified*. As the Greeks who wanted to see Jesus that day learned, if you want to see Jesus, you must see Him there. On the cross. You won't understand Him otherwise. Who Jesus is and what He came to do always go together. If you have a Jesus without the cross or the cross without Jesus, you have nothing. But if you have Jesus Christ crucified for you, risen for you, living for you, forgiving you, washing you, feeding you, teaching you, and returning for you, you have a Saviour. And you have hope and life.

We preach Christ crucified. We Lift High the Cross (LSB #837). *Our Tongues Sing the Glorious Battle* (LSB #454). And satan will rage and some will desire something more interesting or spectacular. But through this message the Spirit will work. The Spirit who points us to our Saviour. The Spirit who is working to conform us to the image of our Saviour. That the message we proclaim in word be also the message we live in our deeds. Loving and laying down *our* lives for others, as Christ did for us.

We preach Christ crucified. Paul, you, and I. And may it always be so.

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