



## **Fifth Sunday After Epiphany**

**February 5, 2017 - 10:15 a.m.**

**Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor**

**Theme: “NOTHING” MEANS EVERYTHING!**

### **Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1-12**

<sup>2</sup> And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

<sup>6</sup> We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. <sup>7</sup> No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> However, as it is written:

“What no eye has seen,  
what no ear has heard,  
and what no human mind has conceived”<sup>[b]</sup>—  
the things God has prepared for those who love him—

<sup>10</sup> these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.



The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. <sup>11</sup> For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.<sup>12</sup> What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

Well, it's Super Bowl Sunday today, and the red-hot Atlanta Falcons are facing the vaunted New England Patriots at Reliant Stadium in Houston, Texas. We've already heard plenty from and about both teams. There's been an overabundance of hype from players, coaches and fans and in-depth analysis from experts who have scrutinized every possible aspect of how today's game will play out. Sports talk shows have focused almost 24/7 on the Super Bowl the past week. But in a week of media blitz—with thousands of reporters grasping for any kind of story—it's mostly been a whole lot of noise about nothing. The game will settle it all. Spectacular plays might well be made by both teams on both sides of the ball. Or it could end up being a real snooze-fest with the overly-expensive 30-second TV commercials providing the only highlights of five hours spent in front of the tube.

What a striking contrast to the Apostle Paul's approach to his ministry among the Corinthians, which he reminds them of in detail in our sermon text. He writes: "And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God . . . I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words." The Apostle Paul didn't talk a whole lot about nothing, but his words that we're considering today do center on a triple negation—*not, no one, nothing*—that turn out to be an incredibly positive message. In fact, from this portion of God's Word we'll discover and rejoice that . . .

### **"NOTHING" MEANS EVERYTHING!**

What do we *want* to hear? What do we *need* to hear? What do the redeemed people of God need to hear? What does the fallen world need to hear? St. Paul answers those questions when he says to the Corinthians in our text: "I resolved to know *nothing* while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." The Gospel does *not* rest on and it is *not* revealed through the wisdom of men. It rests on and is revealed through the power of God. As highly intelligent and as gifted an orator as the Apostle Paul was, he reminded his Christian "brothers and sisters" in the Corinthian congregation: "When I came to you, I did *not* come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God." In fact, he went on to say, "*No* eye has seen . . . *no* ear has heard . . . *no* human mind has conceived" the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit" in His Word. Only in His Word does God reveal the promised Savior to a blind world still trapped in the darkness of sin and unbelief. That's the message of the Epiphany season.

While it's quite easy for us to sit inside this sanctuary and take pot-shots at the wicked world "out there," it's quite another thing to honestly assess the ways in which you and I have been overly impressed by "human wisdom" and the fine-sounding arguments it makes that

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undermine or oppose what God, in love, has revealed to us in His Word while at the same time we underestimate the valuable blessings that come from Bible study, prayer, worship, Baptism and Communion.

“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” St. Paul asserts in **Romans 10:17**. The Holy Spirit works through the sweet good news about Jesus to kindle the flame of saving faith in the stone-cold hearts of sinners and stokes it through God’s Word into a roaring fire that provides warmth and light to all in whom it burns as well as to those whose lives they touch with God’s grace. On a similar note, the Apostle Peter encouraged the crowd he’d just preached to on Pentecost, “**Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of you sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**” (**Acts 2:38**). In Baptism, the Holy Spirit worked thru water and the Word to adopt us into God’s family, putting His name on us and engraving our name in the palm of His hand. In those sacred waters, the Almighty Judge of mankind pardoned us unconditionally by. Finally, in His Holy Supper Jesus invites us, “**Take and eat, this is my body given for you for the forgiveness of sins. Take and drink, this is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.**” And we depart in the peace of His gracious acquittal, pulsing with the energy of His Spirit to do the good works He has prepared in advance for us to do.

God use simple means to convey His grace—but they’re packed with mighty power! The world considers Jesus—along with His Word and sacraments—too unpalatable for its “enlightened” spiritual taste buds. They want a hand in concocting the recipe for their relationship with God, and that recipe is laden with their own sincere—but misguided—efforts to impress Him with their good deeds as if they are contestants on **Hell’s Kitchen** trying desperately to pass muster with Chef Ramsey and avoid facing his fierce anger as he dresses them down in the pantry. But the anger of the Almighty is exponentially worse than Chef Ramsey’s! And it lasts far longer than an hour-long episode on TV. In the Bible’s book of Hebrews, the inspired writer warns: “**If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.**” He concludes: “**It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God**” (**10:26-27, 31**). Hell lasts for-ev-er, and its pain and suffering far exceeds our imagination.

Thank God we don’t have to impress Him with our impeccable lifestyle to curry His favor or secure His approval, because if that’s how it worked in God’s economy we’d never have a seat at His heavenly banquet table. Nev-er! What a relief it is to know that while there’s **nothing** we can do about the fate we faced due to our sins, Jesus—the Lamb of God—did **everything** we needed Him to do to secure a permanent seat for us at His high feast. As we await the day of His return—or the day He calls us home to His side—you and I are privileged to nourish our faith through the study of God’s Word. The more we dig into it, the more strength we gain to walk in God’s commands, to glorify Him in the world and to serve others in His name in the loving manner in which He so faithfully serves us. Along with His

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triumphant resurrection from the dead, “Christ . . . crucified” is the only thing that truly matters when it comes to putting us back into a right relationship with God. Or else sin still matters. And guilt and shame still count. And eternal damnation still looms beyond death’s doorstep.

But because of Jesus’ death—both as our substitute and our sacrifice—we enjoy a new and glorious reality as His children! Now forgiveness matters! Redemption counts! Freedom is ours! And everlasting life in heaven awaits us beyond the grave! That, my friends, is why we rejoice again this morning that in God’s plan of salvation, **“Nothing” Means Everything!** Our faith—like that of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. Corinthian Christians—is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). And that foundation is unshakable! So don’t let the “wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age” impress you. Later on in this same letter, Paul reminds the Corinthians that “this world in its present form is passing away” (7:31). Listen with believing ears as God calls to you through His prophet Isaiah:

“Come, all you who are thirsty,  
    come to the waters;  
and you who have no money,  
    come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
    without money and without cost.  
<sup>2</sup> Why spend money on what is not bread,  
    and your labor on what does not satisfy?  
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,  
    and you will delight in the richest of fare.  
<sup>3</sup> Give ear and come to me;  
    listen, that you may live.”

And so we come to Him with *nothing* of our own in our hands. We come, robed in His righteousness and covered in His holy, precious blood. We come, clinging to His cross and peering with eyes of faith at the neatly-folded burial shroud atop His empty death bed. We come, in repentant faith, rejoicing as one that **“Nothing” Means Everything!** when it comes to our right-standing with God in this life and the next! Amen.