



Fourth Sunday After Epiphany

January 29, 2017 - 10:15 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: We Preach Christ Crucified!

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

¹⁸For 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. ¹⁹For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”^[a]

²⁰Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

²⁶Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”^[b]

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It took their father on his deathbed to reconcile two sisters and their children. A divide between the two had grown so deep and so wide that it seemed impossible to bridge. And their mom had clearly chosen to favor one over the other. But as they gathered together at the bedside of their husband, father and grandfather he spoke words of love and forgiveness, hope and peace to each one individually. It was his dying gift to his family; it was the legacy he longed to leave his loved ones. And by God's grace alone, old wounds were healed, broken hearts were mended and loving relationships were reestablished as they said goodbye to the Christ-like head of their family. How blessed I was to watch that amazing miracle transpire! That afternoon, Christ made all of them see the foolishness of their pride and the beauty of His love for them. Tears were shed, hugs were exchanged and Facebook friends were made! I know for a fact that the anger and heartache that had come between these two sisters—and their mother—melted away as pride gave way to humility. That's the key: pride has to give way to humility for healing to happen. The Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to show us in today's sermon text that:

CHRIST HAS CALLED US OUT OF CONFLICT TO BE WHAT WE COULD NEVER BE ON OUR OWN

Conflict occurs whenever sinful human pride rears its ugly head. It's as old as mankind. How true it is that "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" as Solomon wrote in [Proverbs 16:18](#). Pride moved Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and wounded pride stirred their firstborn son, Cain, to murder his brother Abel. Sinful pride threatened to unravel the Corinthian congregation Paul had worked so hard to establish during his 2nd missionary trip. Factions had formed over whose pastor was the best. "We follow Paul!" one clique cried. "We hang on Peter's every word," another pocket proclaimed. "Apollos is the most gifted preacher," his booster club boasted. Finally, one faction declared, "We follow Christ!" They were either the humblest bloc, or, more likely, the most, condescending of all.

Our conflicts are no different. Lurking in the basement of every fight is a stubborn human pride that wants to put me first and see attention and love come my way. Paul addresses this same ill in his letter to the Philippians, Ch. 2 Vv. 3-5, urging: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." In order to correct the problem in Corinth, Paul calls attention to the fact that none of the members of the congregation were anything special by worldly standards when the Holy Spirit brought them to faith in Jesus, so they shouldn't think of themselves as better than any of the other members of the congregation. He writes: "Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth." Paul could say the same thing about each one of us.

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But conflict withers when we admit that about ourselves. The first step in solving any problem is admitting that it exists in the first place. Let's face it, this isn't the best congregation on the face of the earth—no disrespect to any of you whatsoever. You're not the best parishioners, and I'm not the greatest pastor, husband or dad either, not matter what my coffee mug says. God shoots us down with the very same words He inspired the Apostle Paul to proclaim to the Corinthians: **"Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"** We don't have to think very hard to remember how many times our wisdom, discernment and clever arguments have proved flat-out wrong: from predicting the outcome of the presidential election to the advice we've given to our own children or others.

And that's okay for us to admit. But when we own that truth, we're freed from the need to judge, to compare and to measure up. I can own my failures and not be surprised by yours—nor you by mine. Each and every one of us is a sinful human being. We're not God. God is God. He's the Judge of all mankind, living and dead. You are nothing on your own, and neither am I. But in Christ, we're God's elect sons and daughters and heirs together of eternal life in heaven! That shouldn't surprise us. In fact, it can't surprise is. Jesus was crucified many moons ago for the express purpose of collecting a motley crew of sinners like us and gathering us—a bunch of nobodies, into His body, the Church, of which He is the Savior! For **"God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."** Praise the LORD for choosing you!

Christ called us to faith in Him when we were nothing and transformed us by the power of His cross. Paul writes, **"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."** We realize how foolish we are when we see just how brilliant God's plan is. We could've never thought up a rescue that meant the very God we offend willingly took the punishment we deserved and died so that we could be saved from eternal death in hell through the sacrifice He made for us. We realize how spiritually impotent we are by nature when we see God in human flesh hanging helpless on a cross, and yet through His death He was powerful enough to save the whole world. Paul notes: **"For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand 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 human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."**

Christ transforms us by His Spirit into people whose lives are now devoted to serving Him and blessing others in His name—starting first with the members of our family and extending to our fellow members of Living Hope Lutheran Church as well as **"all those everywhere who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord, and ours"** (1 Cor. 1:2) as Paul wrote in the opening words of 1 Corinthians. **"It is because of him that you are in Christ**

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Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”

No matter what our IQ is, we have “wisdom from God” to grasp His one-of-kind plan of salvation. No matter how many sins we’ve committed—or will commit during the course of our brief life here on earth—we were clothed with the snow-white robe of Jesus’ “righteousness” at our baptism in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Despite our moral impurities, we’re covered by the “holiness” of our Savior Jesus. He paid the price to buy us back from sin’s guilt and power, to rescue us from Satan’s death grip and to liberate us from an eternity of suffering in hell’s fiery pit. Jesus truly is our “redemption” from every single one of our spiritual foes!

Friends, at the heart of our conflicts lies a terrible lie which Satan would have us believe. For that old evil foe would feed that ravenous thing within all of us that sees us as the center of the universe. Christ smashed Paul’s little solar system and turned his myopic world-view upside down on the road to Damascus where he was headed with arrest warrants for the Christians who had fled the fierce persecution they were undergoing in Jerusalem. Saul the persecutor became Paul the Apostle. His zeal for God was used by the Lord to found Christian outposts throughout the Mediterranean world and to pen the bulk of the New Testament. So Paul was smashing to smithereens the Corinthians’ sinful pride in order to transform them into God’s humble flock of believers, equipping them to be used by the LORD for the advancement of His kingdom among the pagan people of that ancient city. And this morning, Paul does the same thing with us. He humbles us, so that we live lives that serve our Savior by serving one another and the people we interact with every day. Through Paul, as through the prophet Micah, God “has shown [us], O mortal” men, women and children, “what is good. And what . . . the LORD require of [us]: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [our] God.” Amen.