

SERMON FOR JANUARY 29, 2023
TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 1: 18
THEME: THE POWER OF THE CROSS

The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

In the name of Jesus:

An American businessman traveled to Europe to see the famous Oberammergau Passion Play. Following the performance the businessman had the opportunity to meet and talk with Anton Lang who portrayed Christ in the play. Seeing the **cross** that was used in the play, the businessman wanted his wife to take his picture holding it. He attempted to lift the **cross** to his shoulder. To his surprise he could hardly budge it from the floor.

He said to Mr. Lang, "I don't understand. I figured the **cross** would be hollow. Why do you carry such a heavy **cross**?" Mr. Lang's reply explains why this play draws people from all over the world to that little Bavarian village. He said, "If I did not feel the weight of His **cross**, I could not play the part."

Do you feel the weight of the cross? The cross of Christ is everything and means everything to the Christian. So many people in our world have not only the wrong impression but also the wrong understanding of what Christianity is all about. The Apostle Paul points us to the truth of Christianity in our text for today, for the Church, then and now, is all about the cross of Christ, because the POWER OF SALVATION IS IN THE CROSS.

Many look at Christianity and Jesus through the lens of a system of ethics. The thinking goes like this: Jesus was a good teacher, a moral person, and taught people how to live and get along with one another. God is love, and Jesus loves everyone, so we should love everyone. Now, in one sense, Jesus did teach about how a person should live. The Beatitudes are loved by many because people look at these statements and think that Jesus is telling us how to live.

That was the problem in Paul's day and age. Christians in Paul's time, as in ours, were viewed and are viewed as foolish people. Foolish in the sense of "who can believe such nonsense?" Paul tells us that in his day and age people sought to become wise either by following some kind of philosophy or by looking for the miraculous. He says: "**20** Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? **22** For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom," and in doing so place their trust in such things and thereby regard Christianity and those who believe in Christ as foolish people.

The same holds true today. Many intellectuals will look for the meaning of life in their ideas, and others who are influenced in the secular world will be impressed by the wonders of science, and will then dismiss Christianity and its message as foolishness. The prevalent belief of many today is that Jesus and the teachings of the Bible are reduced to something like this: God is love, God loves everyone, so if you just believe in God and are good, then you will go to heaven. It is akin to the notion that everyone who is good goes to heaven. This certainly is NOT what the Bible teaches, but it is what a great many people

believe today, and so, to speak in terms of what the Bible does teach, that Jesus alone is the way, truth and life and that no one comes to the Father except by believing in Jesus, to believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven is regarded as nonsense and foolishness on the part of many today.

Have you ever listened to some people in the media who make fun of Christians and act like Christians are a bunch of morons? Now, I was raised to not call anyone a moron or even to use the term, but please hear me out. The word Paul uses in describing the attitude of the unbeliever toward Christians is that anyone who believes in Jesus is a moron. The exact word used is where we get our word called moron, which is a person who is lacking wisdom and lacking sense. And that is exactly what Paul is talking about when he writes in our text: “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing “but, but, and this is the key, “ to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

The cross is the power of God. Wisdom and Salvation are all tied up in the cross of Jesus Christ. The crucifixion of Jesus was an act of God in human history. It really happened. And it happened for the salvation of mankind. Christ was crucified to save sinners, to save you. This is God’s Good News for you and the world, that Christ came to save sinners, He came to be crucified on the cross for sinners.

The world suffers as a result of sin. We live in a sinful, fallen world, a world that is filled with defeat, sorrow, pain, humiliation, anguish, failure, sin and death. The Good News of the cross, the power and wisdom of the cross is that God makes His presence known in and through defeat, sorrow, pain and

anguish of the cross of Jesus. The cross of Jesus isn't about glory, it is about the pain, anguish, death and hell that Jesus suffered on the cross for you. God comes to you in the cross of Jesus to offer to you forgiveness, help and hope because Jesus suffered and died on the cross in your place and in the place of every sinner.

Your identity, my identity, the identity of the Church and of Christianity is all tied up in the cross of Christ. For while we were yet sinners Christ died for all. God crucified His only Son to death all so that you would receive God's mercy and love, He crucified His Son Jesus to death to kill death.

Many seek to find God in modern thought, in philosophy, in their ethics and good deeds, and by their own efforts. But all these meet in a dead end in the way to know God. Man can't do it, so God comes down from heaven to meet us on our level, living our life without sin and then dying the death we all deserve on the cross of Christ. The blood of Jesus shed on the cross cleanses you and me and sinners from all sin. Everything in and about our faith and about Christianity is tied up in this fact: Jesus died on the cross to save sinners.

It is the stone cold fact of human history. It is why we confess this fact and truth every week in our Creeds, that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered, crucified, died and was buried. History can't be reversed, it can't be changed, it happened, Jesus was put to death on the cross. Jesus died for you.

This is the message Paul proclaims to the church at Corinth and to you today. It is the message of the entire Bible, the Old Testament that predicts it, and the New Testament that gives eye witness to the fact that Jesus was crucified on the cross and then rose again to life on the third day. The power and wisdom of the cross is that Jesus gives life and salvation to all who believe not just in the historical fact but that Jesus did all of this for you. Jesus says from His cross, "Father forgive them," and you are forgiven. He says "it is finished", so nothing else needs to be done to accomplish your salvation. You are saved by a free gift of God's love through faith in Jesus who was put to death on the cross.

You can now go on living your life having no fear. You don't have to live in fear, anguish, and despair, fearing death and the grave. You can live your life on this side of the grave in hope, confidence, and joy, knowing that now and in the future God is on your side. He loves you with an everlasting love. And that love flows to you from His cross, for the cross of Christ is the power and wisdom of God, the way that God has saved you. And that very same God comes to you today, reminding you that in Baptism your sins are washed away, and here in the Supper He comes to you, in with and under the bread and wine, to offer to you the benefits of His cross.

To be clear, as a follower of Christ you WILL have your share of crosses that you will bear. You will face all kinds of trials and tribulations in your life. Some will come to you just because it is the nature of things in this fallen world, things happen which upset us and cause us pain and confusion. Other

things will happen to you as a result of being a disciple of Jesus and following Jesus in your life. People may treat you differently, you may even suffer some type of persecution for your faith. But in all things you have Jesus. He will never leave you nor forsake you, so that you can say with confidence that no matter what the cross it is that you face and bear, that the Lord is your ever present Help in time of need, all because there is **POWER IN THE CROSS OF JESUS.**

Amen